

Newcomer Youth and Belonging: Education Opportunities and Career Prospects

Xuemei Li & Hua Que
xuemei.li@mun.ca ; hua.que@mun.ca

Li, X., & Que, H. (2016). Integration and Career Challenges of Newcomer Youth in Newfoundland in Canada. *Forum for International Research in Education*, 2(3), 44-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18275/fire201602031082>

SSHRC Insight Development Project

Mediating the Gaps in Language, Identity, and Career with Newcomers: The Case of Newfoundland

The Context

- “Newcomer youth” in this paper refers to immigrants, refugees, and international students between the ages of 16 and 39.
- In 2012, 741 permanent residents landed in NL, and half were youth aged between 16 to 39.
- In the same year, 2050 temporary foreign students came to NL, and 1694 were registered in Memorial University.

Research Gap

Youth adaptation in smaller centers with low ethnic minority populations has not been given sufficient attention

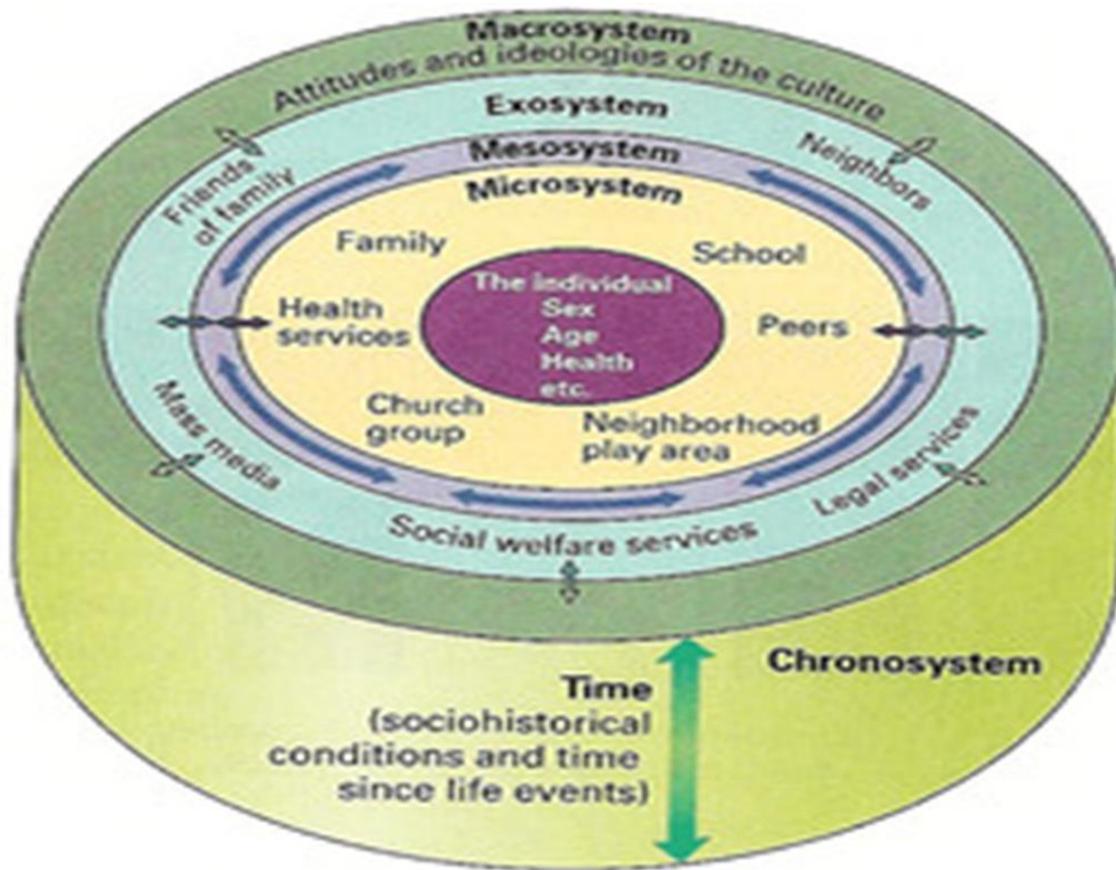
Research Questions

- What are the biggest challenges of CFA youth in Newfoundland?
- How are they supported in their academic and social life?
- How do they articulate their sense of belonging?
- And how do they feel about their future career in relation to the local labor shortage and the provincial government's effort at attracting newcomers?

Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

-- An individual's development is influenced by five environmental systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, with the individual and the characteristics of the individual positioned at the center of these systems.



The Macrosystem of Newcomer Integration in Newfoundland

- Lack of diversity in language, religion, ethnicity

	NL	CA
Mother tongue (English)	97.6%	56.9%
Religious belief (Christianity)*	93%	67%
Ethnic origins (British Isles)	57%	35%
Born in this province	92.8%	85%

❖ Other religious groups comprised a smaller population (0.1% Muslim, 0.1% Hindu, 0 Buddhist), and 2.5% people were non-religious.

- Post-secondary youth think immigrants need good education and language skills prior to arrival (Baker & Bittner, 2013)
- Less than 10% local firms employed newcomers or international workers in the past 5 years (Locke & Lynch, 2005)

The Microsystem of Family Support and Social Network

- Immigrant students whose parents attach great importance to schooling and could help with homework are reported to have a high rate of homework completion (Bang 2011).
- Refugee students living apart from a parent or parents tend to face greater academic frustration because of lack of boundary settings and homework guidance (Kanu, 2008).
- Refugee parents are unable to provide academic help due to their limited education, lack of time, and unfamiliarity with the western school system (Birman & Ryerson, 2007; Bitew & Ferguson, 2010).
- International students who are less independent and less experienced with life away from parents are more likely to feel homesick (Thurber & Walton, 2012).

Individual Challenges: Education and Linguistic Concerns

- Students with a low level of English worry more about their intercultural competence (Yeh et al., 2008) and take part in classroom and daily interactions passively (Tananuraksakul, 2009).
- International students feel greatly challenged in leading classroom discussions (Kim, 2006). Some fail to participate in class discussions because their responses are delayed by the mental translation process and thus miss the right moment to join the discussions (Lee, 2009).
- Students with good language skills decide to go to college, but those with poor English proficiency plan to find a job after they graduate (Ma & Yeh, 2010).

Individual Challenges: Financial and Career Pressures

- Students from refugee families tend to under-perform due to that they are burdened with financial pressure and have to earn bread for the family (Kanu, 2008; Suarez-Orozco et al., 2010).
- Newcomer students who have witnessed their parents' financial struggles “seemed to gravitate toward majors that would lead to well-defined, highly remunerated professions” (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p.321).
- At the tertiary level, tuition fees for international students are much higher than those for domestic students, and yet scholarships for international students are much fewer (Hopkins, 2012; Mewett, Marginson, Nyland, Ramia, & Sawir, 2009).

Methodology

- A qualitative case study
- Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions
- Exploratory analysis and lean coding for themes
- Participants: six newcomers & five service staff

Methodology

Youth Participant Demographics

Code Name	Gender	Age	Academic/Career Status	Year Arriving Canada (NL)	Immigration Category	Country of origin
YouthA	Male	19	Grade 12 high school	2010	Refugee	Liberia
YouthB	Female	17	Grade 11 high school	2011	Refugee	Iraq
YouthC	Female	23	4 th year university	2001/2009	International student	Latvia
YouthD	Male	21	2 nd year university	2011	International student	India
YouthE	Male	29	Construction worker	2012	Refugee	Uganda
YouthF	Female	39	Self-employed	2009 (2011)	With a work permit	Peru

Public Transportation in the Exosystem

- All newcomer high school students were placed in one school and yet their residence was mostly arranged outside the school zone, these newcomer youth were left to their own devices to attend school.
- Inefficient public transport system: less frequent buses; no direct public transport routes to school; expensive bus passes
- The inefficient bus system constrained international students from moving around.
 - ❖ *“I enjoy being outside; (but) here you actually can’t go outside because it’s windy and hard to get around because buses are terribly bad.” – YouthC*

Family Support and Social Interaction in the Microsystem

- StudentA mother's resilience in the face of hard life helped to draw out his inner strength to deal with difficulties and maintain his dignity.
- YouthB, with college-educated parents, was extremely lucky in terms of home support.
- The on-the-spot support from parents was not there for the two international students C and D, but they received important moral support from them.
- YouthE was determined to become financially independent of the government assistance. He told his uncle and cousin, *"I will struggle as much as I can to pay all the bills, to pay the rent until you people get jobs somewhere"*.
- YouthF was living in a family with stable income so she was able to focus on improving her language and running a small business.

Individual's Over-stated Language Barriers

- All the participants were articulate and fluent in English, but all had language concerns.
- YouthA and YouthB's understanding of certain subjects was hampered by educational gaps, curriculum differences, limited English vocabulary.
- YouthC was concerned over his Indian accent and Hindi-English mix.
- YouthD perceived the language-based discrimination against international students from some Canadian peers.
- YouthE was worried about his Kenyan-British accent and was looking for the Adult Basic Education program.
- YouthF was ineligible to most of the services for immigrants and refugees because she came with a work permit.
- Service staff emphasized that newcomers who came to Canada through categories other than refugees and immigrants might fall through cracks.

Individual's Financial Difficulty and Job Pressure

- The three with a refugee background (A, B, E) wanted to complete secondary education and go on with higher education in NL for a brighter job prospect.
 - YouthA had to put his university dream on hold and hoped to get a college diploma and a job to help relieve financial pressure.
 - YouthE planned to pursue the ABE program for better employment and financial security in future.
- The three with higher education (C, D, F) wanted to leave NL for better career options
 - YouthC and YouthD did not have a positive view of the job prospect in NL.
 - YouthD was in particular concerned with his English communication skills at the job market.

Conclusion and Implications

- The recurring themes: lack of family support, financial pressure, linguistic concerns, social isolation, and employment worries
- Lack of funding for needed support: transportation for school age youth
- Lack of coordination among the programs:
 - E.g., YouthB was constrained by financial pressure, lack of friends, mobility, paternal support and social support, without access to counseling to help get over the trauma.
- Public education on the advantages of taking in newcomers for NL: e.g., local employers
- Improvement of public amenities: e.g., metro bus and bus fare
- Creation of job opportunities: e.g., International students with job skills but no local connections.

Questions?