

Background and Purpose

Canada plays a large role in welcoming newcomers and refugees. Statistics Canada (2010) predicts that by 2031, roughly 30% of the population will be a visible minority and 36% will be under 15 years of age. The demographic profile of Canadian society is changing which means schools and classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse.

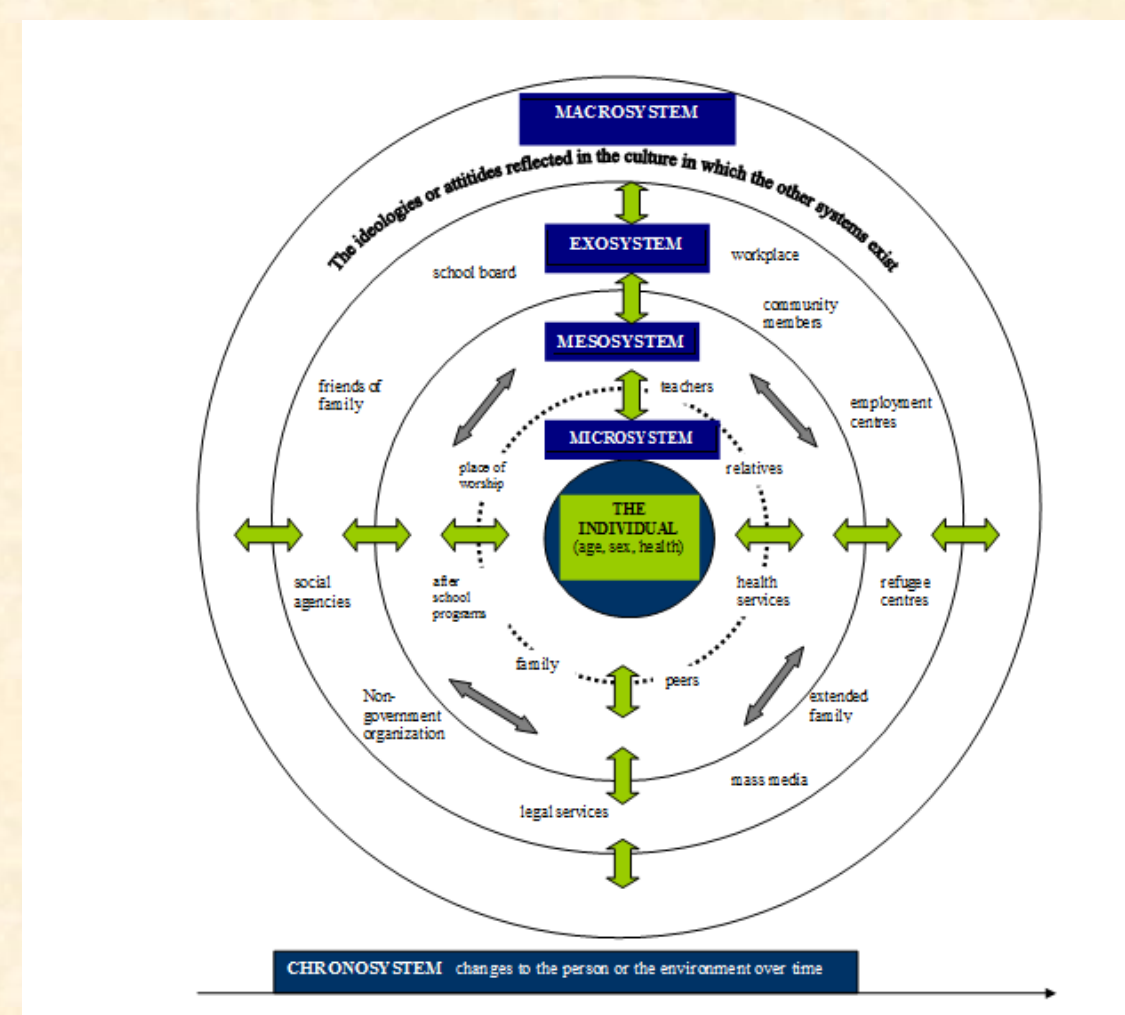
The school is often the first system where newcomers learn about culture and where integration into Canadian society takes place (Wilkinson, 2002). Research has identified significant gaps in both teacher preparation and school readiness to receive and provide successful integration for newcomers, particularly children who have come from conflict affected countries (Stewart, 2011).

Our goal is to investigate programs and services that celebrate diversity, encourage intercultural understanding, and support the integration of newcomer and refugee youth. We want to identify best practices, develop recommendations, and create professional development activities that will prepare teachers/school counsellors and strengthen connections between service providers, community agencies, and schools.

Theoretical Model

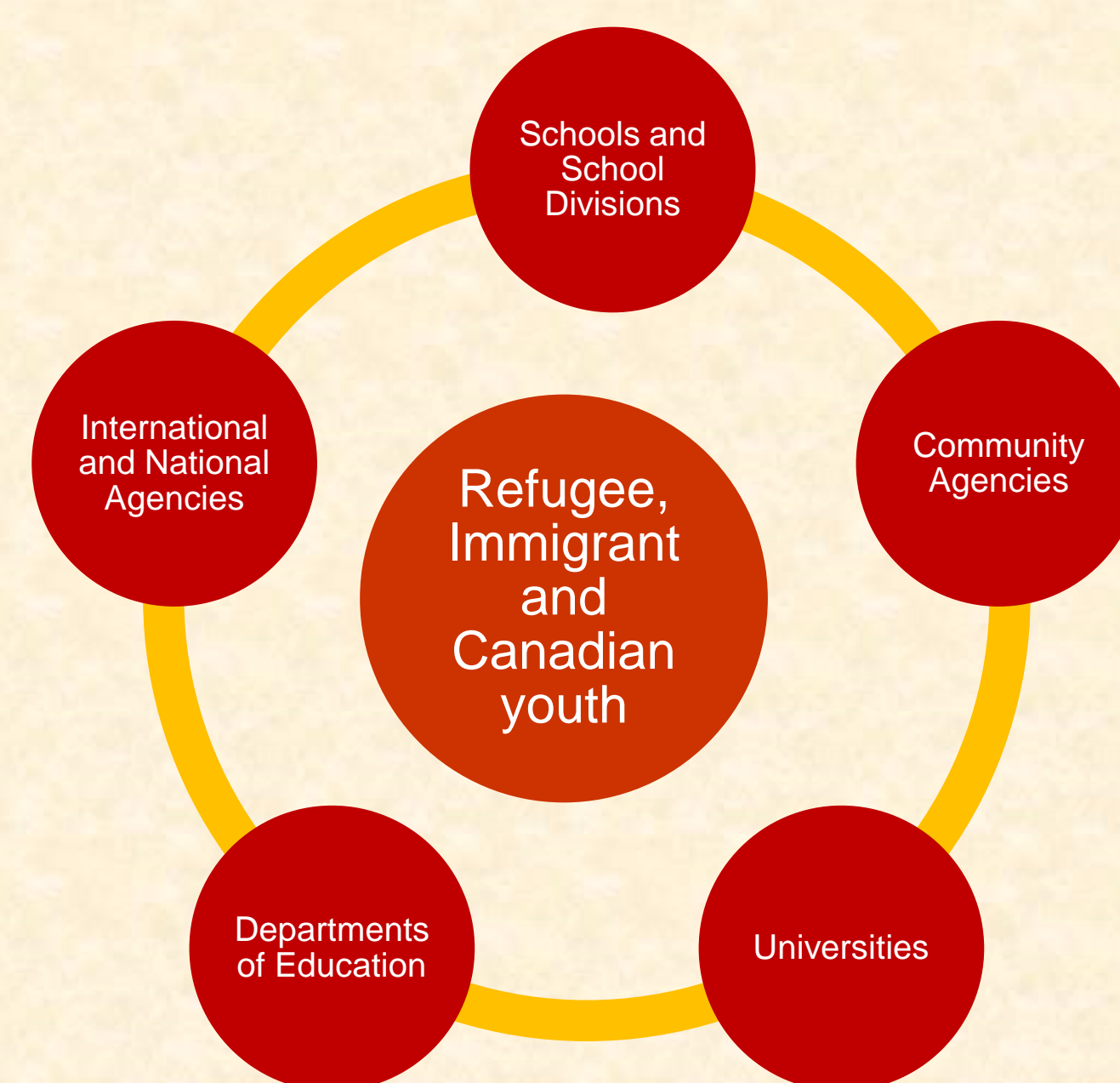
Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model (1999, 2001) provides the theoretical framework for our three-year investigation into the programs and services that support newcomer and refugee youth. The environmental systems used in Stewart's (2011) adaptation of the Bioecological Model are depicted by concentric circles that range from the family to the broader host culture.

As illustrated below, there are five ecological systems that shape the psychosocial development of the individual. In Phase I of this study, we examined how these systems interact with community-based organizations (exosystem). During Phase II, we focused our attention on exemplary after school programs (microsystem) identified during Phase I.



Data Collection

Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological model to structure the research, as well as including participatory action research methods, six distinct phases for the project are delineated. The research design was purposefully developed in a series of phases that span over 3 years, to allow for continual collaboration with stakeholders, community members, and research participants in an effort to engage members in a reciprocal process of learning, investigating, and problem-solving. With the regional focus groups and the culminating national focus group consultation, participants in the research will develop recommendations for practice and policy



Phases of the project

Phase 1 Within each city, 30-50 semi-structured interviews with individuals representing the five ecological systems. Observations of 10 career development programs in each city.

Phase 2 30 individual interviews per city were conducted with teachers, newcomer/refugee students, Canadian-born students, school administrators, and school division consultants in all four cities, representing different communities where there are large numbers of refugee students (identified in phase 1). Five focus groups were conducted in each site with the following participants: refugee students, school counsellors, parents, teachers and school leaders

Phase 3 Collaborators and investigators collected additional information about support systems and resources to meet the specific needs of refugee students. Resources were drafted and then proposed to participants in phase 4. We envision creating approximately 20-30 suggested learning activities that would be taught to pre-service or in-service counsellors in university settings or school divisions that would better prepare counsellors to meet the career development needs of newcomer/refugee students.

Phase 4 A regional focus group career forum was held in each city. Participants in this regional focus group contributed to the development and review of the career development resources and they generated action plans for their communities. Action plans include suggestions for policy, programs and services to support career development for newcomer/refugee youth.

Phase 5 A three-day National focus group consultation will be held in Winnipeg. One community representative from each city and the research team members will present the findings from their respective cities.

Emerging Themes

Integration is a two way process. Canadians also have a lot to do to help refugees integrate into Canada. We can not keep expecting refugees to adjust, integrate, and contribute to the economy unless Canadians make changes and accept newcomers. Canadians need to be more understanding of issues concerning refugees and they need to be more knowledgeable about the world.

Acceptance goes beyond tolerance. We need to reach out to newcomers and employers have a big part to play in creating the climate/culture for refugees and newcomers to feel welcome.

Changes to funding have left major gaps in providing services to people from refugee backgrounds.

Career counselling is largely non-existent in schools and very few schools offer any type of career education programming/services.

Career counselling needs to extend beyond resume building, interview skills, and networking. Career planning needs to be transformational, it should include creativity, personal expression, artistic exploration, and personal and healthy living skills.

Programs are not sustainable and even exemplary programs have been cut due to funding refocus. Little evidence of long term planning and collaborative consultation. Dependent on one or two key people.

Major gaps in the 15-17 year old demographic. Even 15-17 year olds in Canada have difficulty finding work experience. This is exacerbated when students look different, talk with an accent and come from diverse cultures.

After-school programs are filling a gap but the connection to the school from service providers is dependent on the school leaders openness and willingness to work with service providers.

Apprenticeship programs offer a viable opportunity, but no long-term plan for implementation.

Meaningful employment: there is a large gap in services for helping newcomers and refugees find meaningful employment. This is coupled with systemic issues for credential recognition and foreign trained professionals.

Mental health issues complicate the trajectories for newcomers and many counsellors do not have the adequate background to help clients with PTSD or other issues related to trauma, violence and forced migration due to war and insecurity. Clients will not reach out for help because of fear of it affecting their immigration status.

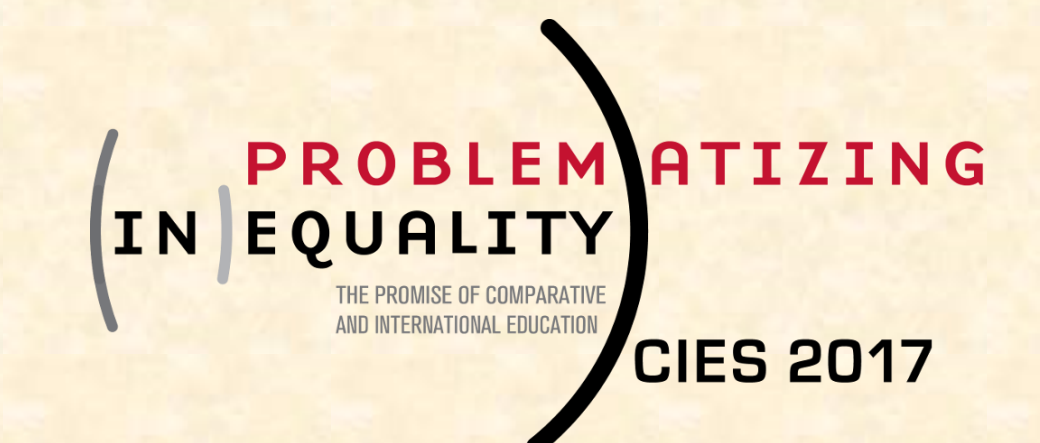
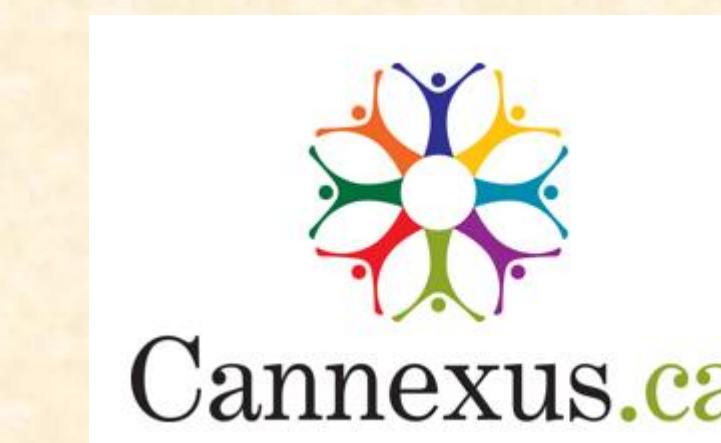
Rural models offer a holistic and personal approach to providing services. Some successful programs and services link career exploration, family support, psychosocial assistance and community building.

Age and learning Gaps exist for refugee/newcomers particularly for students at the secondary level. Ages 17-21 are lost in the system.

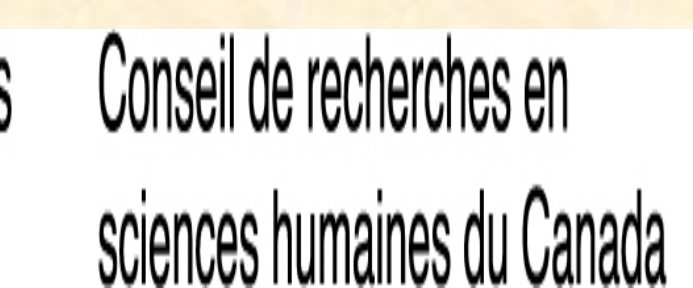


Conferences where this project has been presented

Findings of this project have been presented in the following conferences :



Research funding



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