

Singing my Story: Building Capacity with Newcomer Youth Through Songwriting, Recording, and Creative Arts-Based Pedagogies

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WHAT THE RESEARCH IS ABOUT

OVERVIEW: This study explored the role music played in culture, integration, wellbeing, and creative expression for newcomer and refugee youth by involving youth in the co-composition and professional recording of original songs.

OBJECTIVE: To investigate how collaborative ethnographic songwriting and music mentorship could:

1. Allow youth to reimagine themselves while expressing their lived experiences and perspectives related to integration and resettlement in Canada.
2. Promote well-being and a sense of belonging in youth.
3. Create possibilities for others to learn about the experiences, perspectives, and emergent identities of youth in newcomer and refugee communities.
4. Assist youth in building creative capacity and musical skills.

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION: Research suggests that art and music are integral in helping newcomer and refugee youth reclaim their stories and share their lived experiences. These youth face substantial discriminatory assumptions about their lived experiences that create systemic barriers to their settlement and well-being. This project recognizes that youth have much knowledge to share and aims to amplify their voices through music.

HOW THE DATA WAS OBTAINED

Six youth from newcomer and refugee communities in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews, arts-based activities, and song composition. Six songs were composed through online and in-person sessions and five of these songs were professionally recorded in a studio. The youth also presented and discussed their songs at several academic conferences.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

- Youth used storytelling and songwriting to process and make sense of their complex experiences of displacement and resettlement.
 - Newcomer and refugee youth's experiences are complex, varied, and evolving.
 - Alongside their adult family members, young people have much to share about their experiences of forced displacement, migration, and settlement.
 - The voices of newcomer and refugee youth are often silenced in displacement, migration, and settlement processes.
- Youth shared that they benefitted from collaborative music creation and mentorship.
 - Youth learned the fundamentals of songwriting, singing, and vocal technique, as well as recording in a professional studio.
 - Participants came to the songwriting process with a wealth of creative, musical, and lyrical knowledge, even as first-time composers.

Workshop for settlement organizations: Along with this summary of findings, outcomes, and recommendations, a 90-minute, interactive training workshop has been developed for settlement organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Settlement organizations should incorporate arts- and music-based programming for young people. This type of programming provides opportunities for youth from newcomer and refugee communities to express themselves and share their perspectives, develop a sense of belonging and wellbeing, and build community support.
- Youth from newcomer and refugee communities should be consulted in the development of arts- and music-based programming.
- When conducting research with youth from newcomer and refugee communities, the safety and anonymity of the youth must be guaranteed by all researchers and staff at partner organizations. Enthusiastic and ongoing, informed consent and permission needs to be obtained directly from newcomer and refugee youth (along with parents/guardians if necessary).



ABOUT CYRRC

The Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition (CYRRC) is a network of researchers, service providers, and government partners working together to produce and share research that facilitates the integration of young refugees and their families in Canada and beyond.

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Child and Youth Refugee Research Coalition.

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