

The New Canadians Centre's
Young Leaders (NCCYL)
present:

Tips for Teachers



A guide to making education
more inclusive

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Abstract

The New Canadians Centre's Young Leaders Council (NCCYL) is a group of ten high school students with newcomer experience living in Peterborough-Nogojwanong. We wanted to help newcomer students and ease their experience settling into Canada, and thus this project was created. We gathered the experiences of newcomer youth in the community from public and catholic schools through a Google form and roundtable discussion held in person. We had a total of 38 responses, both in written and verbal form. We summarized their experiences, extracted actionable insights, and presented them as tips for teachers to consider when working with new Canadian students. It was found that school in Canada is generally a nicer experience for newcomer students because it is an easier school system compared to schools outside of Canada, and teachers are friendlier. Canada has far more extracurricular opportunities and more non-academic classes (such as cooking, hairdressing etc.). Racism and microaggressions are major problems for newcomer students, and are prominent in the community. It is difficult for newcomers to find community and make friends because they are seen as outsiders.



Introduction

At NCCYL, we aim to empower newcomer youth in Canada and soothe their experiences to the best of our abilities. High school is among the first places newcomers attend and spend most of their time. As newcomers, we, too, have experienced the challenges presented by Canadian high schools, yet we had no way to share our experience. We wanted to document the experiences of a group of newcomer youth and share them - to make high schools a safer space for both teachers and newcomer students.

Method and Data Collection

We tried to collect as many answers as possible by using a survey through a Google Form. We then invited students from both Catholic and Public Schools to speak at a round table discussion addressing the same questions in the survey. Students remained anonymous to ensure participant privacy. The Google form was shared on social media platforms, and by email. The in-person meeting was held at the New Canadians Centre on May 23 2023 from 4:00 to 6:00 pm to facilitate discussions and gather additional experiences, and involved pizza as an incentive.

Participants were asked the following questions:

1. Rate your school experience in Canada on a scale of 1-5 and tell us why.
2. What is an impactful thing (negative or positive) that a teacher/student did for you?
3. Do you feel like you've integrated into your school community?
4. What are some similarities and differences between the Canadian School System and your native school system?
5. What do you like least about school in Canada?

Participants

All participants were newcomers in grades 9 to 12 attending schools under either Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB) or Peterborough Victoria Northumberland Clarington Catholic District School Board (PVNCCDSB).

Participants were from the following countries: Barbados, Kenya, India, Bangladesh, South Korea, Japan, Brazil, Syria, Iraq, Vietnam, Philippines, Egypt, Zimbabwe, Singapore and China.

From the survey, 16 students answered from the following schools:

- 1 Adam Scott student
- 4 Holy Cross students
- 1 Saint Thomas Aquinas students
- 6 Saint Peters students
- 4 Thomas A. Stewart students

From our Roundtable discussion, 22 students answered from the following schools:

4 Holy Cross students
4 Crestwood students
2 Thomas A. Stewart students
9 Saint Peters students
1 Adam Scott students
2 Kenner students

Results

Q: Rate your school experience in Canada on a scale of 1-5 and tell us why.

When asked to rate their experience in Canadian schooling out of 5, most students rated it a 4 due to positive experiences with peers and teachers. However, lower ratings were associated with overlooked racism and favouritism.

For instance, some teachers mispronounce a newcomer's name and laugh at themselves for it. This can lead the newcomer student to believe that the teacher is laughing at their name.

Q: What is an impactful thing (negative or positive) that a teacher/student did for you?

A student mentioned that a teacher told her she couldn't pursue her chosen career due to her "lack of knowledge because of her ethnic background."

Another student stated some of her classmates called her a "cotton-picker" and proceeded to "fill her locker with pillow fillings." When the same students were confronted, they told teachers it was "a joke taken out of context." No action was taken after this.

Multiple students also commented on the hardships of fitting in with Canadian peers. They feel like the only way to be accepted into pre-existing high-school cliques is by vaping, being in a relationship, and making offensive and racist jokes. Moreover, multiple students were forced to downplay their ethnicities and values in hopes of 'fitting in', yet never feeling truly integrated and accepted.

Another student mentioned that a teacher introduced them to a club at school (chess club). The student didn't know about the different clubs at school, and the teacher went with the student to the club and introduced the students to other club members. This meant a lot to the student, and helped them make friends.

Q: Do you feel like you've integrated into your school community?

A student commented that they felt genuinely isolated from their school environment because many people have their own groups, and are not welcoming them with open arms.

Another student stated that they find it tough to communicate with other students in their school due to the language barrier, and the understanding of different cultures and religions.

Numerous students found that they can adapt to their school community, but it is a difficult journey to achieve. They need to put in a lot of effort to be engaged, and need to take the initiative to introduce themselves to others. This takes a lot of energy and can be draining to new students.

Q: What are some similarities and differences between the Canadian school system and your native school system?

Many newcomer students experience culture shock upon arrival, due to the different languages, customs, educational systems, and lifestyles.

According to newcomer students, the Canadian educational system uses advanced technology, which might be difficult for students as they must learn how to use it. Some newcomer students have never used electronic devices at school and know little about operating different devices.

The majority of the students said that in their native school systems, they were accustomed to spending the entire day in one class. They were able to establish friends more quickly as a result.

Some students claimed the Canadian educational system's speed, subjects, and course material were easier. This is because the school curriculum varies around the world. For example, the curriculum taught at Asian schools is more academically challenging than in Canada. Therefore, students from Asia may find the content taught at Canadian schools significantly easier.

Q: What do you like the most or least about schools in Canada?

The general consensus of the participants' most favourite things in the Canadian Education System was that higher education, extracurricular, and other options were available.

Students have access to various organizations, athletics, and volunteer opportunities that promote skill development and personal growth that “don't necessarily exist in their home countries.” However, they're intimidated to join all the new extracurricular opportunities they've never heard of.

On the other hand, most participants stated that the racism they experience frequently is their least favourite aspect of Canadian schools. Racism continues to be a significant issue for many students, whether it manifests as overt discrimination or jokes intended to be 'harmless'. Unfortunately, ignorance of topics like racism among students highlights the critical need for more thorough instruction and understanding around diversity in Canadian classrooms.

Results

(These are the actual Tips you've been waiting for)

Based on the trends of responses received from participants, here are tips that are recommended for teachers:

- Teachers should try not to make judgements or embarrass newcomer students for asking questions that may seem simple or obvious.
- Paying more attention to how newcomer students get treated by other students, and if they see something that is disrespectful to the student's ethnic background tell the student being disrespectful to stop. Please don't let any racism slide.
- Create safe environments in the classroom for newcomer students. This can be done by sharing ground rules at the start of the year or session, including an intolerance to racism and discrimination. Some teachers assume that older high school students would know this already, but reiteration is important.
- Offering new students a volunteer to show them the school and its system for their first week so they feel more confident and comfortable. The buddy system already exists for new grade 9 students, however, doesn't carry over for newcomer students in older grades.

- Offering common workshops talking about how to handle and acknowledge racism, and de-escalate tense situations between students. These workshops should also discuss topics like setting, respecting, and following personal and social boundaries.
- Ensuring newcomer students know that there are words that cannot be said (racial and offensive slurs).
- Respecting newcomers' opinions when they don't want to read something out loud for the class, because they may be insecure about their pronunciation, for instance.
- Instead of turning to stereotypical beliefs about cultures and religions, teachers could talk to the students themselves. However, they should not expect students to constantly teach them about their own cultures and ethnicities.
- Ensuring students are comfortable before asking questions surrounding race, religion, or ethnic backgrounds, especially in front of the entire class, or among other students.
- Teachers must understand the academic requirements and expectations of the Canadian educational system are different. Teachers can better guide and encourage newcomer students by being aware of possible gaps in grading, evaluation techniques, and classroom involvement.

- **Get to know your students and introduce them to extracurricular activities, sports teams, and volunteer projects. Sometimes a friendly adult makes a difference when joining a club or team.**
- **Continue to offer assistance and resources for career planning, scholarship applications, and higher education. One of the ways teachers can do that is by finding out the interests of specific students and recommending them to specific opportunities for those students.**
- **Discussions around racism are sometimes stigmatized, making teachers reluctant to bring it up in class. This is an important topic, and newcomer students would like to see it brought up and addressed in the classroom.**

Final Comments

We know teachers are not perfect, and we are not waiting for you to change the world. Everyone is a work in progress, teachers and students alike. We are hoping that with the ever changing challenges newcomer students face, that you will also develop your approach to them. We hope this serves as a useful resource made by New Canadians, for you - everyday heroes that empower all Canadians.

