

Discussion Guide

for Video

Tough Conversations: "Things I wish they knew about youth with refugee experience"

Panelists:

Saeed Alzoubi

Chadia Kayinamura

Katonde Marc Matuka

Praise Mugisho

Sarah Nyazungu

Host: Heureuse Nsonya

Researchers: Dr Susan M Brigham, Mount Saint Vincent University
and Dr April Mandrona, Nova Scotia College of Art and Design University

Consultant: Ryan Veltmeyer, Youth Art Connection

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From right to left: Sarah Nyazungu, Chadia Kayinamura, Saeed Alzoubi, Katonde Marc Matuka, Praise Mugisho, and Heureuse Sonya (host).

Brief Context

In 2020, an estimated 281 million people left their countries of birth to live in another country. Canada is experiencing the highest population growth on record due to international migration. International migration accounts for 95.9% of Canada's population growth in 2022. In 2022, Canada has welcomed 437,180 immigrants and an estimated 607,782 non-permanent residents (e.g., people on work or study permits or asylum claimants) (StatsCan, 2023).

Refugees are the only group of immigrants admitted to Canada solely on humanitarian grounds (Ferede, 2010). They may have experienced violence, war, displacement, persecution, environmental devastation, or famine. More refugees are increasingly settling in Atlantic Canada especially in mid-size cities such as Halifax, Nova Scotia. Refugee youth (or as the youth in this project prefer to be called – 'youth with refugee experience') may arrive in Canada having had interrupted formal education due to factors such as poverty, political instability, forced migration, settlement in under-resourced refugee camps where they may have received inadequate schooling (Ferede, 2010), or cultural reasons (DeCapua, 2016).

Acronyms used by the panelists (in order of their usage)

IRCC = Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada
UNHCR= United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
DRC = Democratic Republic of Congo
Gen Z= People born between 1990s and 2010
EAL = English as an Additional Language
HRCE = Halifax Regional Centre for Education
HRM= Halifax Regional Municipality

Discussion questions

1. When refugees arrive in Canada, they are given a lot of information from Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and assistance from various programs related to financial issues, access to healthcare and education, and finding employment. Despite this helpful information, Praise raises several concerns [2:40 – 12:26]. Later, Heureuse elaborates on this [15: 00 – 16:35]. What are their main concerns? How might these concerns be addressed?
2. Refugee families experience various pressures that affect their stress levels and mental health. Praise, Heureuse and Chadia talk about the effect of these pressures on families. What are some of these complex pressures and effects? What are their recommendations for addressing these concerns? Who in the community can assist families with these pressures? What are some concrete ways they can assist them? [12:28-12:57]
3. The panelists point out some differences between the parents and their children's migration and settlement experiences – especially the children referred to as *Gen Z* (i.e. those born in the 1990s to 2010). What are some adult learning principles that would help address some of the concerns raised by the panelists about the

struggles adults in refugee families may be facing when learning new skills and processes (such as banking and using computers)?

4. Sarahⁱ, Katonde Marc (referred to throughout the video as Marc)ⁱⁱ, Saeedⁱⁱⁱ, Heureuse, and Chadia^{iv} share their experiences in school in Canada, which were fraught with challenges.
 - a. What were some of the challenges they experienced?
 - b. What could the school system and mentors do differently to ensure youth are not feeling like they are being underestimated or held back by being required to re-do courses they have already taken or do not need?
 - c. What could the school system and other organizations do to help the youth better integrate and succeed in their education?
 - d. Do their experiences point to recommendations for teacher training (i.e. Bachelor of Education programs) or for teacher professional development?
5. Sarah [26:00 -28:15], Praise and Heureuse [30:58- 35:44], and Saeed talk about the issues they have experienced with their parents. What are some examples they give? Who in the community can help youth and parents navigate their family roles which changed/are changing post-immigration to Halifax? What might this assistance look like (e.g. workshops, classes, talking circles)?
6. Sarah and Heureuse [27:33 - 30:52] refer to the value of therapy aimed at relieving emotional distress and mental health problems, which Heureuse says may be a taboo topic for some people, perhaps more so for their parents' generation. How might refugee families learn about the work of therapists or counsellors and how and where could this support be made available to the youth and parents who need it?
7. Marc [1:10:34 – 1:15:58] shares what he wishes employers knew about youth with refugee experience and recalls experiences of discrimination. What are his recommendations for employers? What are his suggestions for youth who are looking for employment? Who in the community can help youth find employment and help them understand work culture? Who in the community can help employers see the potential and value of employing youth with refugee experience? What are some concrete ways they can assist the youth?
8. After watching the video, are there specific stories that were shared by the youth that you found particularly powerful or impactful? Please explain.
9. Are there any commitments you can make that could make a difference for youth with refugee experience? If so, what are they?

References

- DeCapua, A. (2016). Reaching students with limited or interrupted formal education through culturally responsive teaching. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 10(5), 225–237.
- Ferede, M. K. (2010). Structural factors associated with higher education access for first-generation refugees in Canada: An agenda for research. *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 27(2), 79–89.
- Statistics Canada (2023). Immigrants make up the largest share of the population in over 150 years and continue to shape who we are as Canadians. Retrieved May 20, 2023, from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/221026/dq221026a-eng.htm>



The project team: Back row: Saeed and Marc, next row: Praise, next row: April and Chadia, next row: Ryan and front row: Sarah, Heureuse, and Susan.

End Notes:

ⁱ Sarah explains that she was required to take a beginner English as additional language (EAL) class when she was already fluent in English [21:10-28:19]. Later, Heureuse [36:34] re-emphasizes this.

ⁱⁱ Marc later adds how he was ‘set back’ despite having done high school in English [35:46 – 36:33] and he mentions it again in relation to having done high school courses in Alberta before arriving in Nova Scotia [52:40 - 55:22]

ⁱⁱⁱ Saeed [37:57] explains the difficulty of trying to blend into the high school system when he did not have proficiency in English to do the courses he was enrolled in. He says he wishes Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) (and parents) would do more to understand the reasons why youth do not attend classes or finish high school.

^{iv} Heureuse [47:48] adds that some youth feel excluded by their peers and Chadia [1:02] points out the trauma that youth may have experienced which affects the students’ motivations and behaviours.

