

Overcoming barriers to the positive development and engagement of ethno-racial minority youth in Canada

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper explores the dynamics behind and ways of overcoming barriers to the community, school, and civic participation and engagement of immigrant and Canadian-born ethno-racial minority youth with a view to improving their developmental outcomes and increasing their engagement and sense of belonging in adolescence, young adulthood, and beyond. In this paper, “youth” is defined to include young people aged 12 to 24 years. The paper draws on academic literature, policy think tanks, government and government-affiliated organizations, and non-governmental organizations in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. to explain the root causes of ethno-racial minority youth exclusion and to identify ways of involving these young people in processes to combat racism and discrimination, promote positive youth development and engagement, and prevent long-term social and economic exclusion and its consequences.

The 2006 census shows that one in five Canadians was born in another country, and about 15% of immigrants (almost 58,000 people) are youth aged 15 to 24 years.¹ Overall, three-quarters of immigrants are members of ethno-racial minority groups,² who now account for 16% of Canada’s population. Almost 23% of ethno-racial minorities in Canada are aged 14 years or younger.³

It is of obvious benefit to all Canadians to ensure that ethno-racial minority youth mature to become full participants in, beneficiaries of, and contributors to all aspects of Canadian society. Our standard of living and prosperity, our role in a global economy, and the social stability of our communities and the country as a whole all depend on our ability to nurture a large cohort of well-educated, productive, responsible, and civically-engaged young people. This cohort must include the growing proportion of our youth population which is comprised of new immigrants and children of immigrants who are members of ethno-racial minority groups.

Most immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth in Canada are doing very well: They are emotionally strong, engaged in community, succeeding at school, pursuing post-secondary education, and maturing to become the healthy, responsible, productive adults who will fully participate in, benefit from, and contribute to all aspects of Canadian society. Some youth, however, are at risk of long-term social and economic exclusion. These youth are not receiving the supports and benefits required by all young people to achieve their full developmental potential. Instead, racism, workforce barriers, education challenges, and social and cultural isolation appear to be sowing seeds of discontent, feelings of marginalization, low sense of belonging, and insecure ethnic identity among some ethno-racial minority youth. As noted by Palameta, “[i]f the children of immigrants—the second generation—experience similar impediments to social and economic integration as their parents did, then low socioeconomic status may persist, risking the creation of persistent underclasses.”⁴

Long-standing racial problems in the U.S. and the emergence of serious intercultural tensions in France and the U.K. reveal that extreme exclusion of ethno-racial minority youth can have dire consequences both for the youth and for society as a whole. The British experience in particular may offer important lessons for Canada. Despite the many differences between the two countries including, at least until recently, policy approaches to settlement and integration, emerging issues in Canada echo those which began to arise in U.K. about 20 years ago and have escalated since September 11, 2001. As noted by Gregg, “to date Canada may have avoided the kind of ethnic conflicts that have beset England and France not because of more progressive and effective multicultural policies, or greater societal tolerance, but simply because it got into the ethno-racial minority immigration game a generation later.”⁵

In both the U.K. and Canada, immigrants are suffering long-term and, recently in Canada, apparently insuperable barriers to economic integration. In Canada, these barriers continue for second-generation ethno-racial minority men. In both countries, members of ethno-racial minority groups continue to experience discrimination and racism; racism against Muslims in particular has been on the rise since September 11 and in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The effects of racism are keenly felt by ethno-racial minority youth and adults in both Canada and the U.K. although, in Canada, about 80% of dual-citizenship Canadians report that they feel a “strong” or “very strong” sense of belonging in Canada.⁶ In the U.K., a rise in the number of ethnic enclaves or parallel communities” is interpreted as a direct manifestation of exclusion and low sense of belonging and affiliation to the larger community. There is no consensus about either the causes or the consequences of ethnic enclaves in Canada, although researchers on both sides of the argument continue to play close attention to the number and nature of enclaves in this country. Collectively, all of these issues suggest that Canada should not rest on its positive past experiences with first- and second-generation immigrant integration. We have not experienced the nature and depth of the problems which have arisen in the U.K., but more can be done in Canada to strengthen the foundation of our harmonious, ethnoculturally- and religiously-diverse society.

Fortunately, Canadian governments and policy makers will continue to address racism and discrimination through strong human rights legislation, policy, and practices. In addition, research shows that there are many ways in which ethno-racial minority youth can be supported to develop self-esteem; a positive, coherent sense of identity that includes home and new cultures; and practical skills and competencies to succeed and engage in community and civic life. The research suggests that, for some youth, this is best accomplished by helping them to understand and challenge the barriers that they encounter in their daily lives, and to fully participate in democratic processes to support and influence governments to redress social justice issues in schools, communities, and public institutions and systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores the dynamics behind and ways of overcoming barriers to the community, school, and civic participation and engagement of immigrant and Canadian-born ethno-racial minority youth with a view to improving their developmental outcomes and increasing their engagement and sense of belonging in adolescence, young adulthood, and beyond. In this paper, “youth” is defined to include young people aged 12 to 24 years.

The 2006 census shows that one in five Canadians was born in another country, and about 15% of immigrants (almost 58,000 people) are youth aged 15 to 24 years.⁷ Overall, three-quarters of immigrants are members of ethno-racial minority groups,⁸ who now account for 16% of Canada’s population. Almost 23% of ethno-racial minorities in Canada are aged 14 years or younger.⁹

It is of obvious benefit to all Canadians to ensure that ethno-racial minority youth mature to become full participants in, beneficiaries of, and contributors to all aspects of Canadian society. Our standard of living and prosperity, our role in a global economy, and the social stability of our communities and the country as a whole all depend on our ability to nurture a large cohort of well-educated, productive, responsible, and civically-engaged young people. This cohort must include the growing proportion of our youth population which is comprised of new immigrants and children of immigrants who are members of ethno-racial minority groups.

At present, however, some ethno-racial minority youth face serious barriers to engagement that can place them at risk of long-term social and economic exclusion. As detailed in this paper, evidence of increasing racism, deteriorating or stagnant economic conditions for recent immigrants, poor educational outcomes for a subgroup of immigrant youth, and research indicating that some second-generation ethno-racial minority youth feel less engaged and a lower sense of belonging in Canadian society than their parents do collectively indicate that more needs to be done to ensure that we continue to build the strong society to which we aspire.

Long-standing racial problems in the U.S. and the emergence of serious intercultural tensions in France and the U.K. reveal that extreme exclusion of ethno-racial minority youth can have dire consequences both for the youth and for society as a whole. Caution must be exercised not to foster unfounded fears about ethno-racial minority youth in Canada. Most are doing very well; in fact, in some ways immigrant youth are doing better than Canadian-born youth of European ancestry. Canada’s long history of strong social policies and legislation around multiculturalism and equality may have helped to lay the foundation for a harmonious, ethnoculturally- and religiously-diverse society. On the other hand, Canada did not begin accepting large numbers of ethno-racial minority immigrants until the 1970s. Gregg surmises that “to date Canada may have avoided the kind of ethnic conflicts that have beset England and France not because of more progressive and effective multicultural policies, or greater societal tolerance, but simply because it got into the ethno-racial minority immigration game a generation later.”¹⁰

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This paper draws on academic literature, policy think tanks, government and government-affiliated organizations, and non-governmental organizations in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. to explain the root causes of ethno-racial minority youth exclusion and to identify ways of involving these young people in processes to combat racism and discrimination, promote positive youth development and engagement, and prevent long-term social and economic exclusion and its consequences.

2. YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

2.1 *What do we mean by engagement and why do we care?*

Definitions of youth engagement vary but, in the literature, “engagement” usually refers to participation in activities that benefit the youth themselves and, often, their communities or society as a whole.¹ Vehicles for participation often include youth groups, schools, community organizations, voluntary organizations, and faith groups; types of participation range from volunteering and service learning to advocacy, activism, and forms of involvement in electoral politics, such as voting.¹¹ Models of youth engagement include youth advisory groups, youth forums and surveys, service activities, philanthropy, *ad hoc* consultations with youth, web forums and discussion boards, and inclusion of youth as governors of community organizations and public bodies.

“Engagement” usually refers to participation in activities that benefit the youth themselves and, often, their communities or society as a whole. It also refers to participation and a sense of belonging in community, school, the workforce, and other aspects of life.

The term “engagement” also refers to participation and a sense of belonging in community, school, the workforce, and other aspects of life. In some ways, the two meanings of engagement are reciprocal: Engagement as sense of belonging can foster participation in activities, communities, and institutions, and the process of participation can foster a sense of belonging. Both types of engagement are critical to both positive youth development and to healthy societies and democracies.

In these ways, engagement is both a process and an outcome. As a process, engagement in school and community is a path to positive youth development and long-term social inclusion. Participation in activities, communities, and institutions promotes positive identity development, social responsibility, and the development of a wide range of life skills and competencies. Participation is also a vehicle for youth to acquire the knowledge, skills, and desire to influence the decisions that affect them—in other words, to engage in democracy—and effect positive social change to the benefit of the individuals involved and to society as a whole.

Stolle and Cruz note that “[a]ny substantial decline in youth engagement may have important long-term consequences for two reasons. First, early youth engagement is sticky, meaning that youth who are not socialized into the habit of active democratic citizenship might not learn it later on, changing our societies fundamentally through generational replacement. Second, social capital and citizen engagement are important resources at the community and country levels; a permanent decline might potentially affect Canada’s political and economic resources.”¹²

Much of the discussion about youth engagement in both Canada and the U.S. pays little attention to ethno-racial minority youth, although a small body of literature on engaging African-American youth is emerging in the U.S. This is unfortunate because research shows that racial discrimination, unemployment, real or perceived lack of rights, poverty, lack of hope for the future, lack of sense of control and lack of sense of belonging influence both “youth participation in mainstream politics and

¹ The Canadian Centres for Excellence in Children’s Well-Being define youth engagement as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything - sports, the arts, music, volunteer work, politics, social activism - and it can occur in almost any kind of setting.” This definition is broader than most of those offered in the literature. See Centres of Excellence for Children’s Well-Being, *Youth Engagement*. 2007. *What is Youth Engagement?* Available at www.engagementcentre.ca.

their resistance to marginalization through the formation of subcultures and via political protest.”¹³ Subcultures form when youths forge an alternative identity in response to social marginalization and declining life-chances, along with conflicts between family identity and mainstream society.¹⁴ This is widely recognized in the U.K., where immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth and adult engagement is very high on the social policy agenda.

2.2 Positive youth development

“Positive youth development” is a relatively recent approach to understanding and influencing the stages and components of human development and the relationships between stages of development and environments. The new approach has arisen from both technological advances in science beginning in the early 1990s and a social interest in improving the life chances of all people and, particularly, those who are disadvantaged in some way.¹⁵ Today, it is widely recognized that the achievement of particular developmental outcomes in childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood is essential to ongoing healthy development and subsequent success and happiness in adulthood. There are innumerable theories about how individuals develop physically, cognitively, and socially from birth to adulthood, but there is general consensus about the primary pathways of development and the critical factors and conditions that foster achievement of important outcomes, abilities, and personal characteristics at different stages of life. For ethno-racial minority youth, engagement—in school, in community, in society—and identity development are especially critical components of positive youth development and a desired outcome in adulthood.

Helping youth in Canada and elsewhere around the world to achieve these developmental outcomes has become more challenging in recent years. All youth can flourish when they are provided with safe, loving and stimulating environments; supportive family and friends; positive school experiences; opportunities to contribute their perspectives and experiences and make a difference; healthy physical activities; and opportunities to discover and develop their talents and interests. However, over the past two decades, economic, social, demographic, and policy factors have contributed to the erosion of our individual and collective capacities to fulfill these conditions. These factors include evolving family roles and responsibilities, global strife, structural shifts in and globalization of the economy, withdrawal of governments from the social policy sphere, and a growing divide between our richest and poorest citizens, and they have intensified the challenges and difficult transitions faced by youth.¹⁶ For immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth, such challenges are often compounded by additional stresses including the experience of racism, isolation, and language and cultural barriers.

Box 1. Basic model of youth development¹⁷

| <i>Desired outcomes in adolescence (ages 13-18) for successful transition to early adulthood</i> | <i>Desired outcomes in early adulthood (ages 19-24) for successful transition to adulthood</i> | <i>Desired outcomes in adulthood (≥ age 25)</i> |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school completion, commitment to learning, and informed forward-looking strategy • Critical thinking skills and use of logic, ability to solve abstract and concrete problems • Clear values, positive inter-personal relationships, pro-social attitudes • Positive sense of identity based on self-esteem; sense of self-efficacy, sense of purpose; sense of optimism about the future and sense of belonging, self-regulation and restraint, high levels of moral reasoning • Good physical health, avoidance of risky lifestyle behaviours | <p style="text-align: center;">➔</p> <p>Basic and higher order skills, knowledge, habits, values, and support systems needed to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enter and succeed at post-secondary studies and/or secure employment with opportunities for advancement. • participate in community and civic life as voters, volunteers, advocates, decision makers, and leaders • maintain a balanced personal life and be in and/or create strong families and communities | <p style="text-align: center;">➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic self-sufficiency • Healthy social relationships • Healthy family relationships and good parenting skills • Community involvement and contribution and good citizenship |

3. BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT FOR ETHNO-RACIAL MINORITY YOUTH

Research about immigrant and ethno-racial minority children and youth in Canada is scant and that which does exist is sometimes inconsistent or even conflicting.¹⁸ It is clear, however, that a range of inter-related barriers and challenges can impede or retard the integration process for immigrant youth and the engagement process for both immigrant and Canadian-born ethno-racial minority youth. These include low income and employment barriers, the experience of discrimination and racism, social isolation, issues of identity and sense of belonging, barriers to learning and English-language acquisition¹⁹ and, possibly, residential isolation in “parallel communities” or “ethnic enclaves.”

3.1 Low income

Immigrant and ethno-racial minority children and youth are more likely than other Canadian children to live in low-income households. Campaign 2000 reports that, in 2001, 49% of recent immigrant children and 34% of ethno-racial minority children lived in families whose total income fell below the Statistics Canada Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO).²⁰ Other research using 2001 data revealed that 44% of black children compared to 19% of non-blacks lived in low-income households.²¹

Low income among immigrants is largely attributable to higher rates of unemployment, low wages, and employment in low-skilled occupation among immigrants than among people born in Canada, despite the higher education levels of newcomers: More than twice as many recent immigrants (about 51%) hold a university degree compared to those born in Canada.²² Historically, new immigrants have earned less than the average native-born Canadian upon arrival, but their earnings have caught up to or surpassed the Canadian average after 10 to 14 years and, among immigrants selected on the basis of education and skills, as soon as one year after arrival. In the 1990s, however, one in five new immigrants lived in chronic low income (at least four years out of five). Low-income among immigrants reached decade-high levels in 2002 and 2003, about 3.5 times higher than the rate among the Canadian-born population. In 2000, 52% of those in chronic low income were skilled economic immigrants, and 41% had university degrees.²³

Research indicates that even Canadian-born ethno-racial minority men face economic disadvantages due to workforce barriers. Taking education levels into account, the research shows that the female adult children (aged 17 to 29 years) of immigrants have significantly higher hourly and annual earnings than young women with Canadian-born parents. This is partially attributable to geographic clustering in higher-income cities and delayed marriage and childbearing among the second-generation women compared to their counterparts. However, everything else being equal, young ethno-racial minority men born in Canada to two immigrant parents earn significantly less than those with Canadian-born parents. The earnings of second-generation men who are not ethno-racial minorities, on the other hand, are no different from those of men with Canadian-born parents.²⁴ Clearly, these differences cannot be attributed to English-language deficits or lack of recognition of foreign educational credentials or work experience.

3.2 Discrimination and racism

Research confirms that both immigrant and Canadian-born members of ethno-racial minority groups continue to experience racism in Canada. The 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey indicated that 49% of Canadians who are black, 34% who are South Asian, and 33% who are Chinese reported that they had experienced discrimination or unfair treatment because of their ethnocultural background, most often in the context of the labour market.²⁵ Other research shows that incidents of hate-motivated crime and other violent manifestations of racism have increased since September 11, 2001.²⁶

Ethno-racial minority youth are not exempt from the experience of racism and discrimination in Canada. According to a study conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) in 2000, school-aged youth reported experiencing discrimination at school, while older youth emphasized discrimination when looking for employment. As a result, although immigrant youth generally feel well integrated and happy to be in Canada, the vast majority of focus group participants in the CCSD study said that it was difficult for them to feel accepted as Canadian by others.²⁷ Other research confirms the experience of ethnically-based bullying and harassment among immigrant and ethno-cultural minority youth in late elementary and early high school,²⁸ and discrimination against ethno-racial minority male youth, particularly black and South Asian youth in the context of the justice system, is high on the public policy agenda.²⁹ Recent research has also found that 23% of ethno-racial minority immigrant youth either agree or strongly agree that their job opportunities might be limited by discrimination, compared to 10% of Caucasian immigrant youth.³⁰

Although immigrant youth generally feel well integrated and happy to be in Canada, the vast majority of focus group participants in the CCSD study said that it was difficult for them to feel accepted as Canadian by others.

Discrimination has been identified as a serious obstacle in the process of adjustment and sense of belonging for immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth. Research shows that perceived discrimination clearly and systematically increases acculturative stress and behavioral symptoms, and decreases self-esteem and life satisfaction.³¹ Generally speaking, the more discrimination an adolescent perceives, the lower his or her self-esteem and the more stress experienced. Moreover, perceived discrimination also seems to decrease the degree of adolescents' identification with their heritage culture (i.e., their ethnic identity).³² In addition, the ability of ethno-racial minority youth to cope with peer pressures and discrimination, and thereby develop and maintain the sense of belonging and engagement crucial to academic success, is associated with self-esteem, sense of identity, and overall feelings of empowerment. For all youth, self-esteem is an essential component of well-being and a predictor of achievement in all areas of life, including school. Extensive research has confirmed that immigrant adolescents' stress symptoms and self-esteem have direct significant effects on their school adjustment.³³

Research shows that perceived discrimination clearly and systematically increases acculturative stress and behavioral symptoms, and decreases self-esteem and life satisfaction. It also seems to decrease identification with heritage culture.

Ethnically-based bullying and harassment are highly correlated with disengagement from school and poor academic performance. A Canadian study on bullying and harassment among immigrant and ethnic minority youth in late elementary and early high school years confirmed that students from minority groups were more likely to experience ethnic victimization than students from the majority group.³⁴ In other Canadian research, immigrant students from particular ethnic backgrounds identified school violence, bullying, and extortion as problems they faced. For the most part, this was

specific to boys, although many girls reported being teased by other girls because they were immigrants, did not speak English, or were new to schools.³⁵

Young people are most vulnerable to peer opinion in junior high and the early years of high school, especially with respect to the pressures they feel to engage in certain behaviors, or wear particular clothes in order to fit in.³⁶ For example, in one Canadian study, both male and female immigrant youth across several groups mentioned that “the intense pressure to dress fashionably as defined by their Canadian peers was a source of stress for them. Several noted that the repercussions of not dressing well included teasing, ostracism, and loneliness.”³⁷ An American study found that the three most common reasons reported by immigrant students for not liking school were, in order of priority, a lack of friends in school, being insulted or laughed at by classmates, and difficulty in comprehending what the teachers said.³⁸

Although one B.C. study reported that the children of ethno-racial minority immigrants who report high levels of discrimination in certain contexts also report high sense of belonging in Canada,³⁹ other studies indicate that the opposite is true. A recent study by Reitz and Bannerjee found that, partly as a result of a sense of racial exclusion, ethno-racial minority immigrants are slower to become integrated into Canadian society than are immigrants of European origin. The Canadian-born children of ethno-racial minority immigrants were in some ways less integrated than their parents, scoring lower than their Caucasian counterparts on measures of sense of belonging in Canada, voting, and life satisfaction. Surveying the implications of their research, Reitz and Banerjee state that “experiences of discrimination and vulnerability remain, slowing the integration of minorities... [T]hese effects may be intensified for the children of immigrants, whose expectation of equality may be greater than was the case for their parents.”⁴⁰

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3.3 Social isolation and peer groups

The establishment of friendships is fundamental to positive youth development. For all young people, having close friends is associated with good emotional health and social adjustment. “Playing together,” “hanging out,” and “doing things together” are among the most important features of youth friendship.⁴¹ Youth with close friends demonstrate better academic performance, lower rates of criminal involvement, and lower school drop-out rates, compared with those who do not have friends as sources of intimacy and social support. Young people who are not socially well-integrated or who have negative peer influences report that they are less satisfied with their lives, less happy with their home lives, less likely to enjoy school and to feel that they belong at school, and more likely to feel lonely and left out.⁴²

A study of new immigrant and refugee youth aged 16 to 19 years in Toronto⁴³ sheds light on why newcomer youth sometimes fail to form important bonds to their new living and learning environment: “At the beginning of their life in Canada, newcomer youth informed about stresses related to lack of language, new environment, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, feelings of isolation, lack of friendships, lack of support, etc. Some also mentioned traumatic pre-migration conditions and experiences that significantly affect their life in Canada.”⁴⁴ The youth reported that, over time, they made friends from within their own ethnic group, but rarely with youth from the mainstream culture. They explained that they often encountered racism, prejudice, and negative attitudes about their home cultures from other Canadians, including teachers. Not only did they fail

to experience a sense of belonging in Canada, they experienced discontinuity between their home and school lives, which (in the researchers' words) influenced their cognitive, emotional and social development, including their sense of identity.⁴⁵

Canadian research also indicates that, whether they were born in Canada or not, ethno-racial minority youth sometimes disengage from the mainstream and “construct exclusionary identities” more as a means of coping with their sense of marginalization than from a desire to marginalize others.⁴⁶ For example, black students sometimes disengage from the mainstream by actively seeking out other black students, or they are alternatively distracted by fears of rejection for not conforming to the prevailing “black identity.”⁴⁷ Likewise, a study of South Asian⁴⁸ immigrant youth in Toronto showed how encountering racist attitudes can drive youth to seek the companionship of other racial minority youth who are respected or even feared by other youth. “Belonging to or becoming a part of this ‘select’ club often brings in power and privileges which are otherwise denied because of the colour of the skin. It is not surprising then that the youth find the pressure to belong to this group difficult to counter or resist or that these become the role models.”⁴⁹

Whether they were born in Canada or not, ethno-racial minority youth sometimes disengage from the mainstream and “construct exclusionary identities” more as a means of coping with their sense of marginalization than from a desire to marginalize others.

These findings are consistent with other studies reporting that lack of friends, personal support, and sense of belonging at school is associated with gang membership. Gang membership and school failure are often connected, although it is not always easy to determine which comes first.⁵⁰

3.4 Belonging, identity, and empowerment

The ability of ethno-racial minority youth to cope with peer pressure and discrimination and thereby develop and maintain a sense of belonging and engagement is associated with self-esteem, positive sense of identity, and overall feelings of empowerment.⁵¹

The formation of a coherent sense of identity is a major developmental challenge for all adolescents, and the pathways to identity development among immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth are not well understood.⁵² We do know, however, that disconnects between home and school values and cultures coupled with racism can jeopardize the development of self-esteem and a positive sense of identity.⁵³ Encouraging or restoring a secure ethnic identity based at least in part on culture of origin can enhance self-esteem and foster personal resilience: “[M]inority youth do better in school when they feel strongly anchored in the identities of their families, communities and peers, and when they feel supported in pursuing a strategy of selective or additive acculturation.”⁵⁴

If they are to become engaged and successful, it is vital that ethno-racial minority youth feel that they can participate actively as equals, which sometimes requires the ability to challenge power structures and reject the status quo.

Related to issues of self-esteem and identity is a sense of “empowerment” among ethno-racial minority youth. Here, “empowered” means that young people can participate confidently and express themselves in school and community knowing that their voices will be heard and respected. While this can be challenging for all youth, it is especially difficult for those whose interactions with others, including authority figures such as teachers, may mirror broader social patterns of inequity. In short, if they are to become engaged and successful, it is vital that ethno-racial minority youth feel that they can participate actively as equals, which sometimes requires the ability to challenge power structures and reject the status quo.⁵⁵

3.5 Education and English-language acquisition among immigrant youth

The research is clear that the academic progress of immigrant youth as defined by school achievement and completion is both a significant component of healthy integration and a predictor of future functioning as adult members of society.⁵⁶

Educational attainment may be the most significant aspect of adolescent development, and certainly has the biggest impact on adolescents' successful transition to adulthood within a host of domains including employment, occupational status, income, housing, marriage, and even health.⁵⁷ Extensive research shows that success in school is intrinsically related to self-esteem, identity development, and other developmental milestones that are essential to happiness and well-being throughout life. In addition, English-language literacy and a high school diploma are the minimal educational requirements for access to the labour market, and even those young people with a diploma and no post-secondary education face a difficult transition from school to work. Between 2006 and 2015, two-thirds of all job openings are expected to be in occupations usually requiring post-secondary education or in management. The highest rate of expansion demand is expected to be in jobs requiring a university degree.⁵⁸ The labour prospects of individuals who drop out of high school will be very poor when the economy inevitably slows down or undergoes another "bust" cycle. Moreover, it is expected that, over time, the labour market will be increasingly polarized between high-skill, high-wage jobs and low-skill, low-wage jobs and uneducated workers will be subject both to conditions that restrict their capacity to participate in the labour market and to discrimination and disadvantage at work.⁵⁹ In short, the long-term life prospects for youth who do not complete high school and pursue some form of post-secondary education or training may include ongoing labour market marginalization, poverty, and social exclusion.

The long-term life prospects for youth who do not complete high school and pursue some form of post-secondary education or training may include ongoing labour market marginalization, poverty, and social exclusion.

3.5.1 The good news

Overall, youth who are immigrants or the children of immigrants perform as well or even better academically than their Canadian-born counterparts.

- In the first years of elementary school, immigrant children whose parents' first language is neither English nor French initially perform less well at school but, by age 13, their performance in all subjects is at least as good as the performance of children with Canadian-born parents.⁶⁰
- Other research using data from Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) revealed no difference in mathematics achievement between immigrant and non-immigrant students, although non-immigrant students outperformed immigrant students in both reading and science achievement. These differences disappeared with number of years spent in Canada.⁶¹
- A third study using Statistics Canada's Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) data compared adult children (aged 26 to 65) of immigrants and Canadian-born parents in terms of educational attainment. This study concluded that the children of immigrants do better in terms of educational attainment than their native Canadian counterparts even after the effects of selected individual characteristics are controlled for.⁶²

Youth from immigrant families also have higher post-secondary enrolment rates, completion rates, and aspirations than Canadian-born youth.

- In 2001, 57% of recent immigrant⁶³ youth aged 20 to 24 years were attending school, as compared with 48% of their Canadian-born counterparts.⁶⁴
- In 2006, foreign-born people aged 25 to 54 were almost five times more likely to be attending school in 2006 than their Canadian-born counterparts.
- Among 25 to 34 year olds, over 44% of second-generation men with both parents born outside of Canada and about 50% of women have 16 or more years of schooling, as compared with 30%, as compared with 30% of men and 35% of women whose parents were born in Canada.⁶⁵

In addition, immigrant youth have significantly higher post-secondary educational aspirations than do Canadian-born youth.

- A recent study using data from the Youth in Transition Survey found that 79% of 15-year-old ethno-racial minority immigrant youth aspired to obtain at least one university degree in their future, compared with 57% of Canadian-born non-ethno-racial minority students. Ethno-racial minority immigrant parents also had high expectations of their children: About 88% of these parents stated that they hoped their children would acquire a university education, as compared with 59% of Canadian-born non-visible minority parents. The study also found that, even when gender, family structure, region, community size, socio-economic status, academic performance, and first language are taken into account, ethno-racial minority youth were still almost twice as likely as other youth to aspire to a university education.
- Some evidence of higher aspirations still remained even when parents' postsecondary aspirations, school involvement, and supervision were included in the analysis, along with students' and their friends' engagement with school.⁶⁶

Even when gender, family structure, region, community size, socio-economic status, academic performance, and first language are taken into account, ethno-racial minority youth were still almost twice as likely as other youth to aspire to a university education.

Several possible, and complementary, explanations have been offered for the higher educational aspirations of immigrant youth.

- Educational aspirations and outcomes are highly correlated with parental education levels⁶⁷ and, as noted earlier, immigrant parents are generally better educated than Canadian-born parents.
- In addition, immigrant parents' expectations may recognize the discounted value of their own credentials in the job market and the need for their children to work harder and prove themselves,⁶⁸ and close ties within ethnocultural communities may serve to reinforce parental expectations.⁶⁹
- Finally, youth who develop "bicultural competencies" may be best placed to take advantage of opportunities because they have a strong sense of ethnic identity but also develop "hybrid identities and cultural formations that transform the 'old' ethnic culture and the 'new majority' culture in creative ways."⁷⁰

3.5.2 The bad news

As pointed out by Weinfeld, "[d]ata which simply compare the Canadian and foreign born, without controlling for ethnic origin and period of immigration, are of little analytical value."⁷¹ It is when the data are disaggregated by age of arrival, country of origin, language ability, and so on that differences in educational success rates begin to emerge.⁷² Most large-scale statistical analyses cannot capture individual circumstances or biases in schools that make high school completion less likely for

minority language youth.⁷³ In addition, the research often fails to disentangle the effects of social and economic backgrounds and tends to treat a very culturally and ethnically diverse group of youth as a homogeneous unit. As succinctly summarized by the National Research Council, the “[e]ducational needs and outcomes [of immigrant youth] differ considerably depending on their socioeconomic status, levels of English proficiency, cultural background, and experiences in their country of origin. Many of these sources of diversity affect educational outcomes, leading to highly variable results across and within immigrant groups.”⁷⁴ As noted earlier, other variables found to influence school success and completion include family and school factors, the student’s experiences with discrimination and marginalization, and issues of identity. Clearly, all of the foregoing variables are often inter-related.

The “[e]ducational needs and outcomes [of immigrant youth] differ considerably depending on their socioeconomic status, levels of English proficiency, cultural background, and experiences in their country of origin. Many of these sources of diversity affect educational outcomes, leading to highly variable results across and within immigrant groups.”

Problems are most acute for ESL students. In addition to mastering a new language, many ESL students must contend with a multitude of other barriers to academic achievement. Duff observes: “[t]o become fully integrated into the mainstream curriculum, [students] must learn to adapt to the linguistic, sociocultural, discursive, and academic norms and practices in content areas.”⁷⁵ Research confirms that drop-out rates are higher among ESL students than among the general school population.⁷⁶ Clearly, English language proficiency is highly correlated with academic success, and many students do not receive sufficient ESL instruction to allow them to master the English language and progress in school.⁷⁷ Research also shows that that being illiterate or semi-literate in one’s home language is a significant factor in educational risk. This is because strong first language skills assist in learning English, as the skills that underlie language acquisition transfer from the first to the second language.⁷⁸ Canadian research confirms that immigrant students with low literacy rates in their home language or limited education levels in their home country are more likely than other immigrant students to drop out of high school. Many of these students are refugees.⁷⁹

Also, in addition to enabling academic progress, research shows that increasing English language proficiency is part of the process by which immigrant adolescents come to see themselves as members of Canadian society. Language skills in conjunction with a sense of national identity foster feelings of acceptance by their peers. Studies have found that the better the immigrant adolescents mastered the majority language, the higher their senses of mastery and self-esteem,⁸⁰ which are also correlated with both integration and academic success.⁸¹

However, the underlying reasons behind dropping out of school often involve other factors, such as economic insecurity, poor mental health, stress or depression, family issues, pre-migration experiences, cultural barriers, racism, and a host of other issues. Consistent with the research on mainstream youth,⁸² Anisef observes that dropping out of school is not a single act or an event that happens independently of any other factors. It is a process in which different but interrelated factors, ranging from the individual and family to school, community, the job market and government policy, are involved.⁸³

The research also points to school-related factors, including ineffective language instruction practices, inappropriate assessment, grade retention and grade promotion, barriers to parental involvement, and different forms of institutional and systemic discrimination, all of which may be inter-related, as factors that contribute to school leaving.⁸⁴

- In many provinces' ESL policies, "[n]on-English speaking students are viewed as 'special needs' students who can be 'fixed' by using the appropriate teaching methods and instructional programs and strategies. ...ESL programs are conceived as being temporary and transitional in nature, with a central emphasis on the movement of ESL students into the 'regular' classroom."⁸⁵
- It may take immigrant children as many as seven years to be literate enough in English to adequately catch up in academic performance and, in any case, ESL alone is insufficient to address the multiple needs of immigrant children and youth.⁸⁶ Despite this, many provinces' policies expect students to achieve sufficient fluency in English to access regular programming in three years.⁸⁷ It has been suggested that, in their current form, ESL programs may only temporarily deal with limitations to educational progress and may serve to further stigmatize and marginalize newcomer students in society.⁸⁸
- School-related problems in the process of assessment and placement can place immigrant students at risk of underachievement and dropping out. A review of research has shown that both grade retention and promotion to the next grade despite poor performance are strongly associated with disengagement and dropping out among immigrant students.⁸⁹ Canadian research suggests that language minority students experience systemic and structural streaming into non-academic courses of study.⁹⁰ First, because of the time required to achieve English language proficiency, the educational and psychological tests often administered to immigrant children within their first five years in Canada are likely to seriously underestimate their potential academic abilities.⁹¹ Second, parents have identified language difficulties, racism, and discrimination as being linked to placements in lower level classes or grades.⁹² Being held back results in lack of challenge and low expectations, both of which are associated with academic failure among all students.⁹³ The risk of dropping out increases substantially when immigrant students are held back and thus become much older than the rest of the class, and when students find themselves either promoted to the next grade in spite of poor performance.⁹⁴ It is suggested that accurate assessment and age-appropriate grade placement supplemented with remedial assistance is the most beneficial option for immigrant students.⁹⁵ Student achievement "is enhanced when the school believes that all students will be successful, adopts a strengths-based, rather than a deficit-based, model in education, and matches programs to students' needs."⁹⁶
- Current expectations that parents play an active role as participants in schools can create serious challenges for immigrant families. Due to language barriers, unfamiliarity with the educational system, inflexible work hours, preoccupation with economic survival, and different views about the role of parents vis-à-vis the role of teachers, immigrant parents may not be able to be involved in their children's education in ways defined by middle-class standards, such as volunteering in the classroom, fundraising, and attending parent-teacher conferences.⁹⁷ For example, a Toronto study found that immigrant parents reported a high degree of interest in and involvement with their children's schooling.⁹⁸ However, their involvement was generally home-based due to barriers to institutionalized forms of involvement, such as classroom volunteering or participation on committees and councils. In addition to day-to-day barriers to involvement, such as work and other commitments, the study found that "[c]hallenges to immigrant parents in becoming involved go beyond language to include other factors such as experience in the country of origin which may operate against the idea of 'partnership' with government agencies or institutions." A second Toronto study focusing on Latin American parents reported that apparent lack of participation among these parents in the school was attributable to "unequal parent-teacher relations and implicit messages that result in parents being marginalized,"⁹⁹ rather than any lack of

Increased emphasis on parental participation "may actually increase inequities in learning outcomes for students unless the multiple challenges involving language, poverty, and work faced by many immigrant parents are dealt with schools, boards, and ministries and their communities."

interest or motivation on the part of parents.¹⁰⁰ It has been suggested that increased emphasis on parental participation “may actually increase inequities in learning outcomes for students unless the multiple challenges involving language, poverty, and work faced by many immigrant parents are dealt with schools, boards, and ministries and their communities.”¹⁰¹

- Institutional or systemic discrimination acts as a barrier for immigrant youth in the attainment of equal educational opportunities.¹⁰² The research suggests that school policies, the discriminatory attitudes of teachers, and the organizational structure of schools where achievement or success among immigrant youth is not encouraged contribute to poor performance, behavioural problems, and school drop-out. A negative school environment contributes to poor attendance, feelings of hostility towards school, and delinquent behaviour.¹⁰³ School structures themselves mediate school engagement and create or reinforce peer-group alliances by either replicating inequality or successfully supporting and fostering success among students.¹⁰⁴ Students “learn less effectively when teachers do not adapt their pedagogy to cultural differences. School personnel sometimes inadvertently put up barriers too, through cultural insensitivity, no welcoming signs, no translation or interpretation, poor outreach and follow-up, and lack of respect.”¹⁰⁵
- Perceptions by students that teachers and counselors treat them unfairly or discriminate against them contribute to a sense of disengagement from school.¹⁰⁶ Racial and ethnic minorities, particularly black students, are more inclined than whites to perceive discrimination in school disciplinary practices. Also salient in perceptions of discriminatory treatment are gender, socioeconomic status, age of immigration, and views of school climate.¹⁰⁷ In some ways, these perceptions may be accurate. For example, extensive research indicates that zero-tolerance policies on school violence are disproportionately applied to ethno-cultural minority youth in the U.S., resulting in suspensions or expulsions for minor offences.¹⁰⁸ Some research indicates that white teachers are more likely to attribute school problems among white students to situational causes, such as family issues, but to blame similar problems among black and Hispanic students on personal characteristics.¹⁰⁹
- It has been suggested that the education system needs to clarify whether its focus is on assisting youth to “fit in” to the existing educational system or on determining why and how the system fails to meet their needs.¹¹⁰ Although many schools now recognize ethnocultural diversity and make efforts to prevent discrimination, ethno-racial minority youth “will continue to be at risk unless the system as a whole is actively working to accommodate their differences and needs.”¹¹¹ Effective school settings provide role models and mentors, and foster climates of cooperative learning and high expectations for *all* students. One feature that is especially crucial for students, particularly low-income, minority, “at-risk” youth, is supportive relationships with adult role models with high expectations of the students. In addition, when possible, in order to mediate the tensions between cultural values and school practices, schools should strive to make cultural concessions to their students, such as alternate dress codes for physical education.¹¹² Schools must also recognize that parental expectations of children at different age levels about responsibilities at home vary significantly from one cultural context to another.¹¹³

Perceptions by students that teachers and counselors treat them unfairly or discriminate against them contribute to a sense of disengagement from school.

3.6 Residential isolation

“Ethnic enclaves,” sometimes referred to as “parallel communities,” are defined in Canada as those census tracts in which more than 30% of the total population is from a single ethnocultural minority group.¹¹⁴ Between 1981 and 2001, the number of ethnic enclaves in Canada increased from 6 to 254. Of the 254, 157 were Chinese, 83 were South Asian, and 13 were black.¹¹⁵ Using an isolation index to measure the “probability that a member of a visible-minority group will meet only members of the same group in a particular neighbourhood,” a 2001 Statistics Canada study found that the isolation index for Chinese immigrants in Greater Toronto increased from 10% in 1981 to 25% in 2001; for Chinese immigrants in Vancouver; the index rose from 18% to 33%. Likewise, the isolation index for Greater Toronto’s South Asian community rose from 6% to 20%; in Vancouver, the group’s index rose from 7% to 25%.¹¹⁶ Analysis of 2006 census data, when it becomes available, may reveal a further increase in both the number of ethnic enclaves in Canada and the isolation of residents of these enclaves.

A comprehensive discussion about possible factors contributing to rising numbers of enclaves and their implications is beyond the scope of this paper. Of interest here is whether living in an ethnic enclave may constitute a barrier to the engagement and positive development of ethno-racial minority youth. There is no simple answer to this question. The detriments and benefits of immigrant spatial concentration for youth appear to depend on the reasons why people are living in an enclave, along with many other factors including the socio-economic status of residents, the quality of the neighbourhood, and the length of time spent in the enclave.

3.6.1 Choice or exclusion?

It must be stressed from the outset that there are many good reasons for which recent immigrants may choose to live in close proximity, especially during the first few years following settlement. Common interests, religions, and languages lay the foundation for social networks and a sense of belonging, and contribute to within-neighbourhood bonding and bridging social capital.¹¹⁷ These neighbourhoods are often low-income because many new immigrants have limited financial means and congregate by necessity in lower-income communities featuring lower-cost housing.

Historically, in Canada and elsewhere around the world, immigrants have dispersed to other neighbourhoods over time as their economic fortunes improved and they integrated into the broader community. In some cases, middle- and higher-income immigrants are choosing to congregate in higher socio-economic status neighbourhoods with a view to establishing ethnic enclaves. However, in many cases it appears that immigrants and, in some cases, their Canadian-born adult children, are residing indefinitely in lower-income neighbourhoods.

This suggests that due to the growing immigrant (and, for some, second-generation) economic disadvantage described in Section 3.1, some immigrants cannot make the choice to move to other, higher socio-economic status neighbourhoods over time. In Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, levels of low income are clearly associated with concentrations of both recent immigrants and certain ethnocultural minority groups in some neighbourhoods.¹¹⁸ Demographic analysis of Toronto’s neighbourhoods reveals an increase from 32% to 62% between 1971 and 2001 in the proportion of immigrant residents in communities with

Due to the growing immigrant economic disadvantage, for some immigrants it may no longer be possible to disperse to other, better-quality neighbourhoods over time.

declining income levels—much higher than the municipal average.¹¹⁹ Borrowing language from Marcuse, this has prompted Hulchanski to speculate about the possible emergence of “outcast ghettos,” where “ethnicity is combined with class in a spatially concentrated area with residents who are excluded from the mainstream of the economic life of the surrounding society, which does not profit significantly from its existence.”¹²⁰

Regardless of their ethnocultural composition, neighbourhoods featuring high concentrations of low-income residents are associated with a host of negative “place-based” effects for children, youth, and adults, where social problems are compounded by the features of the neighbourhood itself.ⁱⁱ ¹²¹ In conjunction with the racial, religious, education, and employment barriers experienced by many ethno-racial minority youth, living in a low-income ethnic enclave may pose additional barriers to engagement and positive development for ethno-racial minority youth. For example, American research shows that poor school performance among immigrants’ children is reinforced by social networks and relationships in immigrant neighbourhoods where English is not widely spoken and there is an absence of high socio-economic adult role models.¹²²

Although there are important historical, cultural, and political distinctions between Canada and the U.K., the U.K. experience with ethnic enclaves offers some important lessons for Canada.ⁱⁱⁱ

It is widely believed that racism and social exclusion are both the reasons for and a consequence of the rise in the number of ethnic enclaves in Britain over the past two decades. An increasing number of “black and minority ethnic”^{iv} communities report that they do not identify with Britain, and that these feelings arise from discrimination and economic disadvantage.¹²³ Feelings of exclusion and the desire to escape discrimination have contributed to “a silent retreat – a gradual withdrawal and clustering of homogeneous communities behind invisible barriers.”¹²⁴

In the U.K., feelings of exclusion and the desire to escape discrimination have contributed to “a silent retreat – a gradual withdrawal and clustering of homogenous communities behind invisible barriers.”

ⁱⁱ While neighbourhood is less important than family and individual factors, (Leventhal, T.; Brooks-Gunn, J. 2000. “The neighborhoods they live in.” *Psychological Bulletin*, 126, 309–337) neighbourhood socio-economic status is positively associated with various indicators of adolescents’ achievement (math achievement, basic skills tests, and grade point average) and negatively associated with educational risk, particularly for male adolescents. (Entwisle, D. R.; Alexander, K. L.; Olson, L. S. 1994. “The gender gap in math: Its possible origins in neighborhood effects.” *American Sociological Review*, 59, 822-838; Halpern-Felsher, B., et al. 1997. “Neighborhood and family factors predicting educational risk and attainment in African American and White children and adolescents.” Brooks-Gunn, J.; Duncan, G.J.; Aber, J.L.(Eds.) *Neighborhood Poverty: Vol. 1. Context and Consequences for Children*. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation).) Similarly, older studies of adolescents have found that residing in a neighbourhood with low socio-economic status is associated with higher rates of criminal and delinquent behaviours. (Simons, R. I., et al. 1996. “Parents and peer group as mediators of the effect of community structure on adolescent behavior.” *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 24, 145-171.)

ⁱⁱⁱ The French experience is not included here because the causes and consequences of ethnic enclaves in France are so different from those in Canada and in the U.K. France has experienced major riots in the banlieues, which are suburbs of Paris and other major cities that are physically and economically run down and whose population is largely made up of visible minority first-, second-, and third generation immigrants, many of whom are Muslim, and who landed post WWII. Many of the banlieues were developed as low-income housing projects and intended to provide relatively short-term accommodation to newcomers and others although, in reality, people have tended to remain in the areas. For many reasons including discrimination, immigration patterns, government immigration and cultural policy, a colonial legacy, and the employment structure and culture in France, immigrants and the children of immigrants who reside in the banlieues have suffered high rates of unemployment and economic, cultural, and social exclusion. Some Muslim youth have responded to the very real exclusion they experience with violence and rioting. See Potts, G. 2007. *French Lessons: A Cross-Channel Look at Regeneration, Cohesion, and Integration*. See also Giry, S. 2006. “France and Its Muslims.” *Foreign Affairs*, October 2006; Kastoryano, R. 2006. *Territories of identities: Immobility and segregation in French banlieues*, June 11th. Available at <http://riotfrance.ssr.org>; Murray, G. 2006. “France: the Riots and the Republic.” *Race & Class*, 47(4); Nicholls, W. 2006. “Associationism from Above: Explaining the Failure of France’s ‘politique de la Ville.’” *Urban Studies*, 43(10), 1779-1802.

^{iv} In the U.K., the term “black” may include people whose ethnocultural origins are African, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and, sometimes, East Asian.

Buonfino¹²⁵ explains that people who do not feel that they belong may then develop a sense of identity based on race, religion, or social standing. “Worn lightly,” he explains, “identities can provide the basis for recognition, for finding a voice, for defining a place in society, and for social relations.”¹²⁶ But the jump from not feeling any sense of belonging in the broader community to a sense of extreme belonging within a minority ethnocultural or religious group—or within a group of disaffected members of the mainstream community—is very small; in both cases, people share a sense of unfairness and injustice which divides them from the system and the outside world. Too little or too much belonging can have serious consequences on the individual and society: People who experience no or little belonging “can be targets of political entrepreneurs who can unite constituencies along racial, religious, or social lines... Terrorist groups, gangs or extreme right groups can often form in deprived areas where there [is] a potential pool of disaffected supporters ready for a new cause.”¹²⁷

“People who experience no or little belonging “can be targets of political entrepreneurs who can unite constituencies along racial, religious, or social lines...”

Some British researchers argue that living in an ethnic enclave can lay the foundation for disaffection and low sense of belonging in the broader community among immigrant and ethnocultural minority youth. Billings and Holden, for example, theorize that South Asian youth living in enclaves in the U.K. first encounter significant racism in late adolescence, when they leave their predominantly South Asian schools and enter the world of work or post-secondary education. Unlike their parents, who may have come to Britain with lower expectations, these young people have grown up in Britain and—like their Canadian counterparts—have the same expectations and aspirations as their white peers. Some youth live with the tension of belonging to a minority group that experiences discrimination and some respond by abandoning their Islamic traditions and assimilating into the wider community. Others find a new sense of identity and self-worth by adopting a more conservative expression of Islam. While most of these people continue to embrace their British identity along with their Muslim identity, some do not, retreating into “enclaved” communities.¹²⁸ In addition, concerns are expressed that, where cultural and religious groups live in enclaved communities, “inevitably there is pressure from them to elevate the rights of the group – to teach and practice their traditions – over the rights of the individual – not to be bound by them.”¹²⁹

4. WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The positive development and engagement of ethno-racial minority youth can be encouraged by combating discrimination and racism, helping youth to build a positive identity that includes home and new cultures, developing practical skills and competencies to succeed in life, and challenging racism and discrimination and social justice issues in schools, communities, and public institutions. The benefits to both ethno-racial minority youth and society as a whole include the prevention of problems potentially arising from exclusion and disaffiliation; supporting youth to become healthy, productive, and civically-engaged adults; supporting youth to improve aspects of society; and, through all of these means, strengthening democracy in Canada.

4.1 *Linking positive youth development and youth engagement*

Positive youth development as described in Section 2 can be described as a process that prepares young people for healthy and productive adulthood. As a result, over the past 15 years or so, services and programs for youth have been encouraged to modify their programming to ensure that they provide opportunities and experiences that help youth to achieve the desired developmental outcomes at each stage of life. Participation in extra-curricular activities and community youth organizations is associated with better self-reported health, higher perceived self-esteem and feelings of control.¹³⁰ In addition, research shows that “[c]ommunity engagement and feelings of community belonging are facilitated through opportunities for youth to participate outside of school in clubs, sports, music, the arts, fundraising, volunteer activities and other community organizations and activities.”¹³¹

In the past few years, there has been a move in the U.S. toward including a community or civic engagement component into youth development work, with three main objectives: (i) helping youth to master specific life skills and competencies and to achieve optimal developmental outcomes; (ii) contributing to community through volunteering and community organizing; and (iii) encouraging political and civic involvement in adult life. Research supports the connections among each of these three objectives. Overall, experimental studies and quasi-experimental evaluations indicate that youth who take part in service-learning or service and mentoring programs are more involved in community or formal civic activities up to six months after their participation in the programs has ended. Youth who participate in service-learning programs may also bring home knowledge about civic matters to their parents. More experimental and longitudinal evaluations are needed before we can make definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of these programs over the long term,¹³² but we do know that political and general volunteering among middle and upper socio-economic status youth in late adolescence and young adulthood among have been linked to predictive factors from infancy, childhood, and adolescence. The key predictors include cognitive ability, family coherence, and membership in a pro social organization (such as Scouts).¹³³ In addition, extensive research shows that participation in community organizations and community service activities in adolescence is associated with voting, community participation, and other forms of civic engagement in adulthood.¹³⁴ Also, adolescents who become involved in volunteer activities have higher educational plans and aspirations, higher grade point averages, higher academic self-esteem, and a higher intrinsic motivation toward school work.¹³⁵

Most important for purposes of the current discussion, linking positive development and community or civic engagement strategies encourages youth to participate in community by taking on organizational governance roles and/or to take action on issues of social justice, to directly work to reform policies and practices that affect their lives and their communities.¹³⁶ Youniss and colleagues suggest that participation during youth can be a critical component of the development of “civic identity,” defined as here “a sense of agency and social responsibility in sustaining the well-being of the community.”¹³⁷ In addition, research indicates that youth who are actively engaged in social change efforts develop three core strengths: capacity (knowledge, leadership and action skills), motivation (understanding and awareness of issues and root causes, systems, and strategies for change, commitment and a sense of responsibility), and opportunity (chances to act on passions, use skills, and generate change through relevant, sustained action).¹³⁸ Moreover, “participating in youth organizing helps young people grow up with a firm [personal] identity, strong motivation to participate, and a host of important life skills (public speaking, conflict resolution, developing habits of sustained involvement, policy analysis, creating community change). Importantly, youth organizing and more contemporary youth engagement strategies promote collective, not just individual, action. Consolidating group identity, a major task of adolescence and young adulthood, is well advanced by these strategies.”¹³⁹

Research indicates that youth who are actively engaged in social change efforts develop three core strengths: capacity (knowledge, leadership and action skills), motivation (understanding and awareness of issues and root causes, systems, and strategies for change, commitment and a sense of responsibility), and opportunity (chances to act on passions, use skills, and generate change through relevant, sustained action).

Summarizing the research, Cooper and Hays state:

“[H]elping youth develop a deeper understanding of societal problems can empower them to become more engaged with their civic environment while also helping them to become more active and successful adults with an interest in social justice, providing youth with meaningful, ecologically valid opportunities for involvement in important community issues is essential for developing future civic involvement. Empowerment happens when individuals perceive themselves to have some control over their environment. The degree to which youth are empowered and committed to civic actions is related to their perception of the meaningfulness of their involvement.”¹⁴⁰

The following table outlining the principles, practices, and outcomes of youth development with an engagement focus is provided by the Forum for Youth Investment.

Box 2. Principles, practices, and outcomes of youth development with an engagement focus¹⁴¹

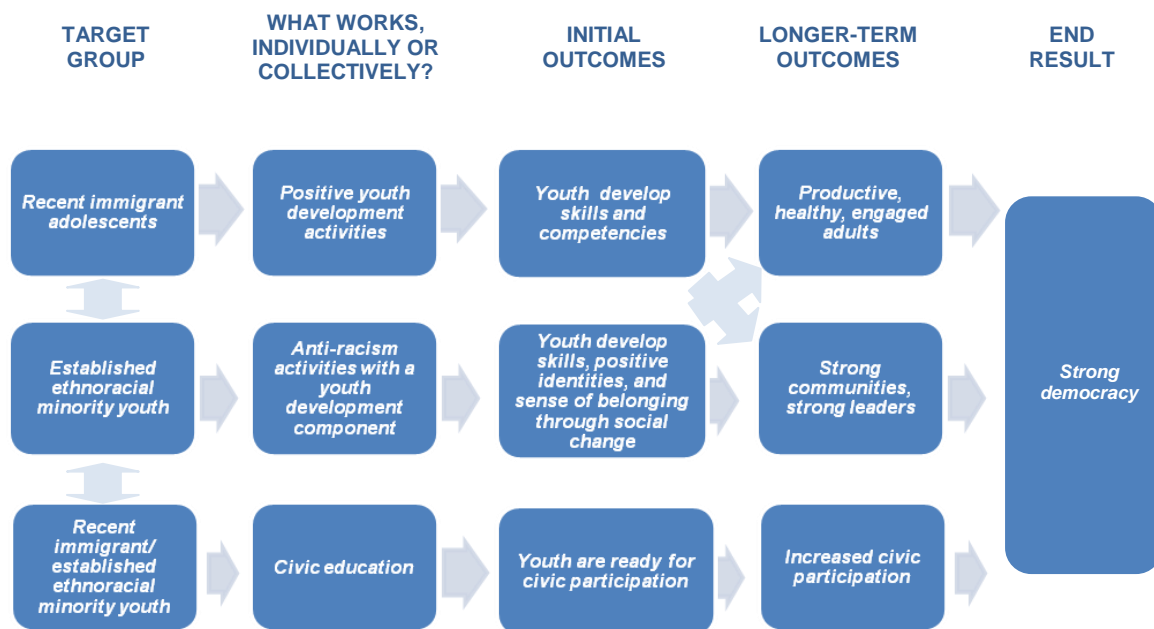
| Principle | Practice | Potential outcomes |
|---|---|--|
| Analyzing power in social relationships | Reflecting about power in one's life | Youth transforming public and private institutions by sharing power with adults |
| Making identity central | Critiquing stereotypes regarding one's identity | Awareness of how sociopolitical forces influence identity |
| Promoting systemic social change | Working to end social inequality (e.g., racism, sexism) | Developing a sense of purpose, empathy for the struggle of others and optimism about social change |
| Encouraging collective action | Involving oneself in collective action and strategies that challenge/transform local and national systems | Building capacity to change personal community and social conditions |
| Embracing youth culture | Celebrating youth culture in organizational culture | Authentic youth engagement, youth led/run organizations |

4.2 Adjusting the model for ethno-racial minority youth

In general, the positive youth development framework has paid little attention to the ways in which discrimination, racism, and other barriers affect ethno-racial minority youth. The places where youth development occurs—schools, community organizations, entry-level employment, formal politics—may simply disregard issues of race, identity, and empowerment; at worst, they themselves be the sources of racism and, therefore, of youth disempowerment and disaffection.¹⁴²

The following model has been developed to summarize the research on immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth development and engagement in visual form:

Box 3. Model of ethno-racial minority youth development and engagement



Stream 1: Modified traditional youth development

Ethno-racial minority youth can benefit from participation in traditional youth development programming, provided that the programming adheres to best practices in such programming (described in the appendix) and that they are not subject to racism in the process. Such programming may, in fact, be the most suitable approach to youth development and basic community engagement for recent immigrant youth, for whom basic acculturation, making friends, and the acquisition of English-language and Canadian life skills is paramount.

For those newcomer youth who wish to become more engaged at the social policy level, it has been suggested that linking them with an existing group or organization that can provide support to the young person on an ongoing

Ethno-racial minority youth can benefit from participation in traditional youth development programming, provided that the programming adheres to best practices in such programming and that they are not subject to racism in the process.

basis may be the most effective approach. Ethno-cultural organizations involved in policy change initiatives, for example, may be best equipped to provide culturally- and linguistically-appropriate information to new immigrant youth on political systems and processes, management structures, and consultation and advocacy methods.¹⁴³

This is not to say that community-level engagement can't or won't lead to political engagement. Research suggests that participation in or volunteering with a community-based organization may be an avenue through which immigrants become more involved in the public sphere.¹⁴⁴ Mata and colleagues comment that “[v]olunteering can help integrate minority youth into the community by giving them a taste of institutional life. This opportunity allows for important interactions between Canadians of different cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Youth volunteering contributes to the creation of new social capital in the community. Large social capital makes communities more dependable on the contribution of its members to achieve certain projects or to tackle the problems that arise. Thus, volunteering provides opportunities for members to engage in expressive activities, to pursue special interests and to acquire social skills and strategic knowledge. Voluntary institutions can also be a cushion for the cultural shock experienced by immigrant youth, facilitating and easing their transition into Canadian society.”¹⁴⁵

Some research indicates, however, that voluntarism's civic potential is contingent on whether the work is performed on an individual basis or through a group affiliation. Simply working on one's own is not sufficient to promote civic engagement.¹⁴⁶

Stream 2: Youth development through anti-racism work

For youth who were born in Canada or who have lived in Canada for a number of years, a new approach to youth development may be most effective. As noted by Ginwright, the experience of racism means that “youth development goals (feeling of safety and belonging, and psychological wellness, for example) are more difficult to achieve. Understanding both the political and personal dimensions of racism allows youth to move away from self-blame and shame. It fosters a critical world view that is shaped by the particular social, economic, and political position.”¹⁴⁷ The capacity to confront, resist, and challenge racism requires quite different skills from those ordinarily associated with youth development processes. “Confronting racism, for example, in police practices, school policies, and other aspects of life, provides a way for youth to engage in civic life that matters to them. As a result, young people develop a sense of agency to change things and foster a sense of purpose and future.”¹⁴⁸

Therefore, anti-racism work is beginning to receive attention in the U.S. as a youth development strategy for ethno-racial minority youth to help them to develop a personal identity, a sense of responsibility, feelings of belonging, and a range of competencies, along with effecting concrete changes in their communities or in society.¹⁴⁹ American research has shown that “[t]he process through which youth develop a critical analysis of their circumstances and then develop both a personal and collective response can be deeply empowering.”¹⁵⁰ Research also shows that youth “representation” in decision-making is not enough. Regardless of the type

The capacity to confront, resist, and challenge racism requires quite different skills from those ordinarily associated with youth development processes.

Anti-racism work is beginning to receive attention as a youth development strategy for ethno-racial minority youth to help them to develop a personal identity, a sense of responsibility, feelings of belonging, and a range of competencies, along with effecting concrete changes in their communities or in society.

of organization, without “going to the next level,” engagement of young people is unlikely to prepare them to think and act in ways that challenge structural racism.¹⁵¹ Although this research is American, its significance in a Canadian context is clear: “The Canadian experience suggests that the inclusion and participation of all citizens in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the community is the necessary starting point for the successful management of diversity.”¹⁵²

The Youth and Racial Equity Project, led by the Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity in the U.S.,¹⁵³ suggests that a commitment to move activism and collective identity development from the margins into the mainstream of youth development could net:

- more deeply engaged young people (because experiences of racism are acknowledged);
- a deeper more significant impact on the life situations of youth of color (because individual and collective actions are taken);
- a significant contribution to the larger society (because racism is challenged); and
- a stronger youth development field (because policies and attitudes that contribute to the marginalization of youth or color are changed).

Building on the work of the Youth and Racial Equity Project, the Washington, DC-based Forum for Youth Investment distinguishes between traditional youth development and youth development with an anti-racist focus as follows:¹⁵⁴

Box 4. Traditional vs. anti-racist youth development

| Traditional youth development | Anti-racist youth development |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focuses on individual achievement and success, typically ignoring structural forces • Racism treated as either a minor or immutable factor in the development of youth, or often ignored all together • Offers few action opportunities for youth or builds those opportunities around volunteerism and civic engagement • Staff may operate from disparate political analyses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers an analysis of the racialized structures of power faced by youth and engages them in solutions • Racism recognized as an important factor influencing the life chances of youth and is addressed explicitly and intentionally in most aspects of program work • Offers opportunities for collective action responses to individual problems and leadership roles for youth • Organization prioritizes a shared and evolving anti-racist political analyses that influences program development and implementation |

The Forum for Youth Development provides examples of anti-racist youth development initiatives, including tutoring and other skills-development programs that incorporate an anti-racism curriculum; projects where youth apply a structural racism analysis in researching and take action on issues in their school or community; ongoing, structured opportunities for youth to explore and heal from the emotional damage of racism; and an intensive staff development process with a focus on racism issues, analysis, curriculum, and approaches.

Stream 3: Formal civic education

Although some American research supports the need for formal civic education in schools and post-secondary education to increase civic engagement, there appears to be no helpful research in Canada or elsewhere on the role of or approaches to formal civic education for immigrant or native ethno-racial minority youth.

With respect to the general post-secondary population, an American study of 21 college and university courses and co-curricular programs that address students' preparation for democratic participation found that the development of students' political understanding, motivation, skills and engagement is fostered through: political discussion and deliberation; political action and research projects; invited speakers who represent political engagement of various sorts or aspects of policy formulation and implementation; internships or placements in government agencies, non-profits and other organizations dealing with political and policy issues; and structured reflection on readings, placements, political action or other experiences. The study also found that increased political learning does not change party identification or political ideology, and that students with little initial interest in political issues made especially substantial learning gains.¹⁵⁵

This study also found that the motivation to be politically active is largely the *result* of community and other forms of civic engagement rather than the cause. Young people are recruited to participate in civic or political institutions and processes for many different reasons, including incentives that may have little to do with intrinsic motivation. Then, in the course of participating, they develop relationships that inspire and make demands on them, gain satisfactions that they could not foresee, and begin to expand and reshape the values and goals that led them to participate, often shifting their sense of identity in the process. Those who are least interested in politics at the outset gain the most from participation.¹⁵⁶

Research suggests that the motivation to be politically active is largely the result of community and other forms of civic engagement rather than the cause.

Overall, the research indicates that “[o]nly when the classroom and out-of-classroom experiences are integrated into individual life experience (actually working in a campaign or a social advocacy movement, or a student-run organization with a broad-ranging social program) is a significant lifelong commitment to civic engagement likely.”¹⁵⁷

5. Summary/Conclusions

Most immigrant and ethno-racial minority youth in Canada are doing very well: They are emotionally strong, engaged in community, succeeding at school, pursuing post-secondary education, and maturing to become the healthy, responsible, productive adults who will fully participate in, benefit from, and contribute to all aspects of Canadian society. Some youth, however, are at risk of long-term social and economic exclusion. These youth are not receiving the supports and benefits required by all young people to achieve their full developmental potential. Instead, racism, workforce barriers, education challenges, and social and cultural isolation appear to be sowing seeds of discontent, feelings of marginalization, low sense of belonging, and insecure ethnic identity among some ethno-racial minority youth. As noted by Palameta, “[i]f the children of immigrants—the second generation—experience similar impediments to social and economic integration as their parents did, then low socioeconomic status may persist, risking the creation of persistent underclasses.”¹⁵⁸

The British experience may offer important lessons for Canada. Despite the many differences between the two countries including, at least until recently, policy approaches to settlement and integration, emerging issues in Canada echo those which began to arise in U.K. about 20 years ago and have escalated since September 11, 2001. In both countries, immigrants are suffering long-term and, recently in Canada, apparently insuperable barriers to economic integration. In Canada, these barriers continue for second-generation ethno-racial minority men. In both countries, members of ethno-racial minority groups continue to experience discrimination and racism; racism against Muslims in particular has been on the rise since September 11 and in response to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The effects of racism are keenly felt by ethno-racial minority youth and adults in both Canada and the U.K. although, in Canada, about 80% of dual-citizenship Canadians report that they feel a “strong” or “very strong” sense of belonging in Canada.¹⁵⁹ In the U.K., the rise in the number of ethnic enclaves is interpreted as a direct manifestation of exclusion and low sense of belonging and affiliation to the larger community. There is no consensus about either the causes or the consequences of ethnic enclaves in Canada, although researchers on both sides of the argument continue to play close attention to the number and nature of enclaves in this country. Collectively, all of these issues suggest that Canada should not rest on its positive past experiences with first- and second-generation immigrant integration. We have not experienced the nature and depth of the problems which have arisen in the U.K., but more can be done in Canada to strengthen the foundation of our harmonious, ethnoculturally- and religiously-diverse society.

Fortunately, Canadian governments and policy makers will continue to address racism and discrimination through strong human rights legislation, policy, and practices. In addition, research shows that there are many ways in which ethno-racial minority youth can be supported to develop self-esteem; a positive, coherent sense of identity that includes home and new cultures; and practical skills and competencies to succeed and engage in community and civic life. The research suggests that, for some youth, this is best accomplished by understanding and challenging the racism that they encounter in their daily lives, and by supporting and influencing governments to redress social justice issues in schools, communities, and public institutions.

BEST AND PROMISING PRACTICES IN INCREASING ETHNO-RACIAL MINORITY YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

1. Public education

Research shows that knowing more about an issue does not necessarily have a direct effect on behaviour. Raising awareness is an important precursor to other changes, but “awareness and knowledge without action will go only so far.”¹⁶⁰ Additional methods are often required to motivate and support people to make the transition from understanding to behaving differently.

Public education and awareness initiatives may include public awareness events (such as those which take place on and around March 21) and education and training sessions (such as conferences and workshops).

| Diversity/anti-racism education/events¹⁶¹ | |
|---|---|
| Desired outcomes | |
| Public events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants change their behaviours as evidenced by increased ability to discern human rights issues, make non-discriminatory choices, identify discrete and systemic barriers, take responsibility for choices and behaviours, and recognize consequences of individual and societal choices and policies |
| Targeted training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are able to recognize and confront/challenge racism in effective and appropriate ways Participants change systems or structures (e.g., hiring practices) to reflect new knowledge |
| Process components | |
| Public events | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include an action component, where participants engage in some form of constructive or learning activity following the event |
| Targeted training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include an action component, where participants engage in exercises such as role plays to acquire and practice new skills and knowledge |

2. Leadership development

Despite the abundance of leadership programs for youth, clear definitions of “leadership” are somewhat elusive. This is partly because leadership is often a fluid concept. In some instances it refers to leadership within a particular community, be it residential, demographic, or organizational; in others it refers to leadership within a particular domain, such as citizenship. In addition, there are many styles of leadership, some of which may be more desirable than others. A concise definition of a leader is someone “who guides the efforts of a group toward a result beyond its current reach.”¹⁶²

Within a youth development framework, leadership is seen to be a composite of many other personal skills and attributes. For young people, the following competencies have been delineated as essential to leadership: group processing and facilitation, oral and written communication, conflict

management, shared decision making, team management, understanding of different cultures, values identification and promotion, utilization of motivational techniques, and vision articulation.¹⁶³ Others have noted that youth leadership also requires courage and tenacity, openness to diversity of opinion, and the ability to set aside personal biases and desires. As defined by the U.S. Family and Youth Services Bureau, “[l]eadership is the ability to make decisions, live with the consequences, accept the blame, share the credit, and learn from the experience.”¹⁶⁴ A review of leadership program curricula from a range of youth development organizations, such as 4-H, shows that most programs seek to nurture most or all of the competencies delineated above.¹⁶⁵

In summary, the components of leadership in adolescence commonly identified across curricula and literature include (1) personal characteristics – self-esteem, sense of efficacy; (2) personal skills - planning and organizing, decision-making, communication; and (3) interpersonal skills - teamwork, influencing others, consideration for others, respect for diversity of opinion, understanding of other cultures.¹⁶⁶ Traditionally, the key activities associated with leadership development include outdoor and wilderness pursuits, sports, service to others, mentoring by adults, and general involvement in structured youth programs.¹⁶⁷

Initiatives to increase youth leadership skills to combat discrimination and racism should seek to achieve the following outcomes and include the following process components:¹⁶⁸

| Leadership development | |
|---|---|
| Desired outcomes | |
| Diversity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased knowledge, awareness and sensitivity about effects of discrimination/racism • increased sense of efficacy to deal with/combat discrimination/racism • ability to use effective personal strategies to combat/address discrimination/racism |
| Leadership | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increased sense of efficacy (general) • increased leadership characteristics and behaviours: self-esteem, planning and organizational skills, decision-making skills, teamwork skills, ability to present an argument verbally and in writing |
| Process components | |
| Developing cultural competency ¹⁶⁹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants experience sense of belonging and safety • Participants are exposed to other cultures • Participants feel that their views are respected • Minority participants are not placed in a position of “answering” for their cultural group • Opportunities to practice skills in a safe, non-judgmental setting • Facilitators/leaders/adults include members of non-dominant racial and cultural groups. |
| Developing leadership competencies ¹⁷⁰ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to lead a group • Opportunity to work in teams • Opportunity to engage in problem solving • Opportunities to practice communication and decision making • Responsibility for making decisions • Engaging in tasks that challenge and strengthen thinking • Engaging in group efforts toward common goals • Choosing projects worthwhile to participants and the community • Learning skills in relation to actual situations • Having others depend on actions • Opportunity for reflection on the experience |
| Developing sense of efficacy ¹⁷¹ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership in the decision-making process • Settings which develop a sense of community and commitment • Settings which are challenging and stimulating • Autonomy and flexibility in activities |

3. Mentoring

It is believed that mentoring programs can help to combat the social and civic exclusion of immigrant youth by building their capacity to overcome the barriers they face via increased leadership and life skills, self-confidence, cultural competence, improved school performance, role modeling, peer friendship development, and community engagement and involvement.

Mentoring may not be ideally suited to the needs of some immigrant children and youth due to:¹⁷²

- **Parental discomfort** -- Some immigrant parents may be uncomfortable having their child in an intense one-on-one relationship with another adult. The parents may feel threatened by the prospect of a non-relative adult usurping parental authority, or may be mistrustful of the intentions of an adult from outside the family.
- **Racial/ethnic differences** -- Cultural differences can have particular implications for immigrant youth. Youth may face language barriers if matched with a mentor who only speaks English. In addition, if a mentor identifies too closely with the mainstream culture, the young person may not receive the support they need to successfully form a bicultural identity.
- **Heightened vulnerability** -- Unexpected termination of a mentoring relationship may be particularly destructive for an immigrant adolescent, especially if they have already experienced the loss of family members and cherished adults during the difficult process of migration

| Immigrant/ethno-racial minority youth development through mentorship | |
|--|---|
| Desired outcomes | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased knowledge of Canadian systems and cultures • Increased Canadian life skills • Increased self-confidence • Improved sense of identity • Increased peer friendships • Increased community engagement and involvement • Improved school performance | |
| Process components | |
| Mentor characteristics | <p>MENTOR, a large mentorship organization in the U.S. suggests that¹⁷³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring with immigrant youth appears to work best when the mentor is also an immigrant and, ideally, shares the ethno-cultural background and language of the mentee • if the mentor does not share the mentee's cultural background and language, it is essential that the mentor is culturally competent • the mentor should be able to reach out to the entire family, gain the trust of parents, and bridge the language barriers faced by many immigrant families • the mentor should be able to connect the mentee to activities, programs and other youth in the community • it can be helpful if the mentor can assist the mentee with homework and tutoring |
| Structures and supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Screening to ensure potential mentors' motivations, suitability, commitment, and availability;¹⁷⁴ • Good training (at least six hours¹⁷⁵), beyond a minimal orientation, that focuses on the practices of effective mentors (below) and provides volunteers with the information and strategies they need to maximize their chances of developing mutually satisfying relationships with youth;¹⁷⁶ • Ongoing supervision of and support for the mentors (at least once per month¹⁷⁷), which may include but should not be limited to mentor support groups, to help mentors develop appropriate roles and relationships, support mentors over trying periods, and ensure that meetings between the mentor and the young person are occurring regularly.¹⁷⁸ • Mentor training and support may be more important in programs serving older youth.¹⁷⁹ • Matching that takes into account the youth's and mentor's preferences in terms of demographic characteristics and activities in which they want to participate is important, but less important than the approach and practices taken by the mentor. Consideration of both parties' interests is more important in programs serving adolescents than in those serving younger children.¹⁸⁰ • The number of meetings and the hours per month spent together by the mentor and the young person is important, but not as important as the types of activities in which they engage.¹⁸¹ • Mentor-youth relationships that endure for one year or more.¹⁸² • Successful integration of mentoring programs into existing institutions requires resources dedicated to the operation of the program.¹⁸³ |

4. Immigrant/ethno-racial minority parental involvement in schools

Decades of research and practical experience indicate that parents' involvement in their children's education contributes to children's success in school.¹⁸⁴ However, there are many barriers to parental involvement in the schools, including parents' lack of time, parents' lack of confidence and perceived lack of skills, and barriers within the school, such as teachers' and administrations' views about what types and levels of involvement are appropriate and desirable.¹⁸⁵ Additional barriers for immigrant parents and low-income parents may include unfamiliarity with the educational system, inflexible work hours, care of other children, transportation problems, preoccupation with economic survival, and different views about the role of parents vis-à-vis the role of teachers.¹⁸⁶ Efforts must be made to overcome these barriers, because "[c]hildren from low-income and culturally and racially diverse families have the most to gain when schools involve parents. The extent of parent involvement in a child's education [may be] more important to student achievement than family income or education."¹⁸⁷

| |
|--|
| Parental involvement in schools |
| Desired outcomes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents are more involved in their children's education as evidenced by increased responsiveness to communications from the school (e.g., report cards, parent-teacher conferences); volunteering for classroom and school activities; assisting children to learn at home (e.g., help with homework, supplementary instruction and experiences, setting goals); participating in school decision making (e.g., parent councils); collaborating with community by encouraging partnerships with community resources.¹⁸⁸ |
| Process components |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address parents' direct needs. Offer programs in parents' primary languages when possible, provide childcare, provide food, and schedule programs at times which are convenient to parents.¹⁸⁹ Support families via the provision of on-site and linked support services, such as parenting classes, English-language classes for parents, and family liaison services.¹⁹⁰ Teachers should provide information for contact outside of school hours.¹⁹¹ Provide information about the Canadian school system and help parents to find a role in the process. Make it possible for parents to know what is going on at school by communicating with them in a variety of ways, e.g., newsletters in the family's first language.¹⁹² Involve out-of-school program providers and parent leaders.¹⁹³ Increase parents' knowledge about and skills for parental involvement via clear and specific suggestions for parent support of learning at home and offering low-stress opportunities for parents to attend and learn about the school (e.g., opportunities to observe in the classroom, descriptions of parent involvement activities through video presentations).¹⁹⁴ |

5. Positive youth development programs for immigrant youth

| Youth development programs for immigrant youth |
|--|
| <p>Desired outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • makes friends • establishes relationship with supportive/positive adult role models • increased knowledge of Canadian culture • increased age-appropriate daily living skills • increased positive engagement in the school • increased self-esteem, sense of belonging • increased sense of self-empowerment, sense of identity • increased social support |
| <p>Process components¹⁹⁵</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver as early as possible following migration. • Ensure the possibility of long-term involvement. • Ensure that participation is open to all immigrant youth. Programs should not be specific to one ethno-cultural group. • Employ staff who share the language and culture of the students and, ideally, have first-hand knowledge of the immigration experience. • Encourage youth leadership and empowerment that support young people to challenge and change injustices in communities and society. • Include a tutoring and mentoring component that provides intense personal attention and encouragement from successful and caring role models. • May use traditional methods of assisting students academically, such as tutoring students in the academic areas, supporting English language development, and organizing programs to promote students' leadership skills and higher education goals. • Provide special activities and supports to help students feel included and welcome. • Include appropriate components for native language support and English language development. • Demonstrate respect for the language and cultural backgrounds of the students they serve and for the positive qualities students bring to school. • Foster awareness and appreciation of other cultures through cross-cultural and anti-bias learning that teaches explicit principles of respect, inclusion, understanding, cooperation and conflict resolution. • Feature and foster family and community involvement. • Services may include parenting classes that address the schools' expectations of parents and children and also help parents to develop English language and literacy skills. • Address social factors that may interfere with students' achievement. |

6. Youth engagement

| Youth development with an engagement focus (Forum for Youth Investment) |
|---|
| Desired outcomes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth transforming public and private institutions by sharing power with adults• Awareness of how sociopolitical forces influence identity• Developing a sense of purpose, empathy for the struggle of others and optimism about social change• Building capacity to change personal community and social conditions• Authentic youth engagement, youth led/run organizations |
| Process components (also see below) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflecting about power in one's life• Critiquing stereotypes regarding one's identity• Working to end social inequality (e.g., racism, sexism)• Involving oneself in collective action and strategies that challenge/transform local and national systems• Celebrating youth culture in organizational culture |

Strategies that youth organizations are currently using to address racism:¹⁹⁶

- **confronting racism directly:** being intentional and explicit in working against institutionalized racism by teaching history, building awareness and providing opportunities to discuss race, racism and its implications;
- **engaging youth in analyzing structural racism:** working with youth to develop solutions and examine root causes by connecting personal experiences of inequity with the related underlying systemic forces, for example, counseling young men about how to diffuse tense interactions with police and holding discussions about the roots of police abuse in some communities;
- **offering opportunities for group action against racism:** encouraging and supporting collective action by developing community action projects and campaigns;
- **creating processes for racial identity development and healing from internalized racism:** supporting the individual exploration and healing that comes from self-reflection, recognizing the importance of culture, and offering opportunities to assess personal decision making; and
- **building common racial justice analysis among program staff and volunteers:** ensuring that staff have a shared vision about racial equity by cultivating an environment in which staff maintain a racial justice movement focus in common and a collective understanding of the role of racism in young people's lives.

Forum for Youth Investment's core principles for engaging youth in community change¹⁹⁷

Have strong and continuous outreach strategies.

- Create an outreach strategy that connects with existing organizations and be intentional about asking young people to get involved.
- Plan a strategy that ensures diversity among youth involved in the program.
- Be intentional about creating a "revolving door" of youth leaders to ensure continuity.
- Balance the need for continuity in terms of issues with the integration of new young people who bring new ideas.

Create a "home base" for young people.

- A "home base" provides a system of support that connects youth to organizational resources and designated reliable adults.

- Youth need designated, accessible work space, access to basic office resources and facilitated opportunities to engage in community change work.
- Creating a “home base” in the neighborhood is important to ground youth engagement work at the neighborhood or community level and to create ownership.

Efforts should be driven by an intentional philosophy about change that young people understand and own.

- Be clear about why you are engaging young people in the first place.
- Have a clear roadmap that includes short and long-term goals and strategies.
- Short-term actions should be embedded within a long-term agenda.
- Be intentional about creating a “ripple effect” to increase impact.
- Articulate clear roles for young people and adults across multiple levels and strategies.

Take issue identification seriously and define clear focal points for action.

- Give young people authentic decision-making power.
- Issues should connect to youths’ lived experiences.
- Connect immediate issues to broader systemic challenges.
- Link systemic challenges to root causes.
- Simple frames are important.

Have a youth and adult team at the core.

- Youth/adult teams are made up of individuals that share a common purpose, goals and strategies.
- Teams need to have clear and meaningful roles and responsibilities for all members that connect to the shared goal.
- All youth and adult team members are held accountable.
- Young people should be engaged as leaders across the organization itself, not just in the community.
- Compensating young people, whether it is through salaries, credits, or other creative strategies, is an important way to send the message that they are not recipients of services but rather colleagues in the community change work.

Be intentional about building youth capacity.

- Have a dual focus on building skills and awareness.
- Balance formal training activities with “on the job” leadership development.
- Provide young people and adults with a range of opportunities to build personal, leadership, teamwork and basic skills.
- Help youth and adult teams develop a shared awareness of the issues, systems and root causes and how they relate to the community’s local history.
- Develop awareness through active, collaborative research and reflection on real issues.

Balance the need for individual supports with the goal of community change

- Youth must feel safe and supported.
- Organizations should provide personal supports and develop their coping skills as well as their professional skills.
- Strike a balance between supporting individual development and focusing on community change.

Create opportunities for sustained access and influence

- Cultivate an audience and create demand for young people’s work.
- Create deliberate linkages to other organizations in the community.

- Build a sense of collective efficacy around a shared agenda.
- Expand the range of concrete opportunities for meaningful youth participation.
- Create clear channels for youth to present their findings and recommendations.

Promising practices for youth seeking to influence public policy¹⁹⁸

1. *Understand the political processes and the art of influence.*

Youth cannot expect to become more influential in the policy realm until they begin to play within the political boundaries of the political process. This does not mean sacrificing principles, but rather, learning how the system works, and the importance of timing, compromise and lobbying.

2. *Develop a clear mandate and focus, and know who your constituency is.*

To be effective, groups must recognize that they cannot be all things to all youth, but rather need to target their efforts and energies. First, a youth group must determine whether its mandate relates to advocacy, service provision, or both. Second, it must outline its priorities and determine which activities best serve its mandate. Third, it must address the question of representation by determining its constituency and ensuring that its structure is responsive to its membership.

3. *Develop strategies to manage the loss of organizational capital.*

The loss of organizational capital (leadership, institutional memory), particularly aggravated by the short leadership cycles in most youth groups, is a failure of strategic planning which youth need to address. With leadership changes, which often occur every year, organizations tend to duplicate past projects, encounter similar problems, and face similar issues, without the benefit of experience. As most youth groups are unable to maintain a paid staff person, they need to maintain an adequate record system as well as look at how to incorporate the experience of past members into the organization's governance structure.

4. *Create an effective communications strategy.*

To secure long-term funding and maintain credibility with its constituency and with policy-makers, youth groups must be prepared to devote time and energy to publicizing the work that they do. There are many organizations at the local level that are well known within their respective communities, but are not even on the radar screen of those they are trying to influence.

5. *Balance the inherent tension between safeguarding complete autonomy and successfully influencing policy.*

Most youth relish the ability to be autonomous and speak their minds without constraint. Balancing the tension means determining how autonomous an organization can or should be in order to reach its goals. Groups with limited autonomy may have less say in setting their policy direction, but can nevertheless have a lot of influence on policy. The question is how much autonomy has to be given up in order to influence decision-making. There are no easy answers, but it is important for youth to recognize the tension between the two and make decisions based on how to best achieve their goals.

6. *To gain legitimacy, produce policy-relevant work and be responsive to the needs and views of your membership.*

Young people who produce policy relevant work gain credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of government. Governments listen to what groups like these have to say, because they have established a track record of producing good work. Legitimacy is also derived from

organizational structures that reflect the needs and views of the membership. If young people feel that the leadership is unresponsive to their views and ideas, they will lose interest and cease to identify with the group.

7. *Learn how to seek out diverse funding sources and implement sound financial management practices.*

Long term sustainability of youth organizations is undermined by the lack of training available for their members to learn how to look for funding, write proposals, build contacts and manage their funds. Many of the groups we looked at either did not know how to access funds or had problems managing the funds they were able to secure. In order to overcome this barrier, youth groups must put energy into building their skill capacity in this area and demonstrate that they are capable of handling projects which involve substantial sums of money.

8. *Build partnerships with like-minded individuals and groups, including intergenerational collaboration.*

In order for youth to become more strategic in their ability to influence policy, they must begin to recognize the advantage of identifying other groups with similar interests or compatible activities, and forging partnerships with those groups. Duplication of efforts due to a lack of inter-organizational awareness or communication not only places youth in competition for funding, but also lessens their ability to influence policymakers. It is important for youth to remember, when collaborating or partnering with adults, to establish a clear set of objectives, expectations and parameters to the working relationship. A failure to do so can lead to “experience taking over,” pushing young people to the side and forcing them to play a much smaller role in the decision-making process.

9. *Empower all members of the organization rather than just those at the top.*

Leadership holds specific importance in youth groups because of the relative lack of experience and the amount of turnover that these organizations face. Therefore, if the leader or leadership is especially strong, the tendency is for everything to be handled and executed by a small number of people. Consequently, members of the organization do not feel empowered and lose interest because all of the interesting work is controlled by a select few, and each change in leadership tends to leave a vacuum at the top. The end result is a weakening of an organization’s capacity to sustain itself and contribute to policy-making in an ongoing way. Therefore, if youth groups are to avoid this predicament, efforts have to be made to involve and be responsive to all of their members.

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