

## **Breaking Down Borders: Examining Shifting Perceptions of Newcomer Youth in the Classroom (Progress Report) By Keenan Krause**

The increasing levels of foreign-born youth crossing the borders to enter Canada and the United States are creating a highly diverse local youth population. These foreign-born youth enter public schools and are changing the demographics of historically monocultural classrooms. However, this shift in the classroom provides opportunities for educators, and associated stakeholders, to reflect on their approach to creating a valuable experience for all students. A key challenge arises when determining the most effective way of integration and positioning "newcomer" students in the classroom and its community. While many academic and educational publications discuss the impact of "newcomer" youth in the local school system, most are implicitly referring to foreign-born students with different skin colour, native language(s), or culture relative to the domestically-born students. As such, in the education field, the term 'newcomer' has become a polite euphemism. It is a more polished term for those who come from countries with languages and cultures different than our own. Some native-born Canadians and Americans continue trying to accommodate diversity but tend to do so only as long as it is comfortable for them. Consequentially, this results in actions devoid of meaningful change or reforms.

Newcomer multilingual learners arrive with strong connections to their native culture and traditions, yet while attending school in the U.S. or Canada, they develop an identity that combines elements of their native and new country. Across both Canada and the U.S., certain educators possess a deficit mindset concerning these students. The phrase 'deficit mindset' comes from academia and represents the perspective that foreign cultures or languages are an obstacle that must be overcome for students to learn the dominant language and culture demanded in public schools (Paris & Alim, 2014). Educators with this mindset work to tailor the students to help them achieve the classroom or curriculum targets. While this may come from a sincere attempt of support, these teachers are often perceived as sustaining the culturally biased education targets facing newcomers within the school system. Gloria Ladson-Billings's (1995) seminal work on culturally relevant pedagogy seeks to change such practices by incorporating students' identities into the structure and content within the classroom. On a similar path is the work of Luis Moll et al. (1992) who illustrates the fact that each student carries funds of knowledge – culturally and historically based pools of experience from the family, which each student brings into the classroom. Often, educators overlooked these pools and miss opportunities that may be tapped into to advance academic learning.

Over the past two decades, academics have called for the repositioning of which knowledge and experiences are heard and valued in the public school system. I will be working with two public high schools, one in Toronto and one in New York City, both of which exclusively teach newcomer multilingual learners. Using these two schools as case studies, I aim to illuminate the impact of the various ways in which teachers position the "newcomer" in the classroom. These lessons may allow schools to promote culturally neutral academic standards and better accommodate the increasing diversity in our schools.