

Centering newcomer youth's experiences in theory and practice: An ethical approach to
generating knowledge and developing equitable services in Montreal

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Abstract

Worldwide, young people are migrating to new societies, building diverse communities, and changing their social, cultural, and economic landscapes. As newcomer youth resettle into their new communities, they are faced with unique challenges and opportunities that require adapting to new socio-cultural norms as well as negotiating their roles in the transition into adulthood.

Article 1 explores how child agency can influence childcare practices within immigrant households. Focus group discussions were conducted with first- and second-generation immigrant young people (12 to 17 years of age) (n=46) and parents (n=19) from South-Asia, Latin-America, and the Caribbean in Montreal. Findings suggest that individual, relational, environmental, and cultural factors influence how child agency is negotiated within the family. This study calls for policy makers and service providers in new societies to consider the perspectives of immigrant children and parents to gain a more culturally nuanced understanding of the elements and processes that influence childcare and supervision practices in immigrant families. Article 2 describes the experiences of newcomer youth and volunteers participating in Say Ça!, a community-based welcome program, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study consisted of photo journals by six newcomer youth (12 to 17 years of age) and focus group discussions with 11 volunteers. Findings suggest that the individualized online program incorporated their interests, encouraged self-expression, offered social and academic support, and was a source of leisure during the pandemic. This study emphasizes the role of child-centred strategies developed by local community-based organizations to tailor services to the changing needs of their population in the context of a crisis. Together, both articles contribute to a deeper understanding of immigrant youth's realities and advocate for these to be considered when developing support systems in the new society that best respond to their needs.

Résumé

Dans le monde entier, les jeunes migrent vers de nouvelles sociétés, construisent des communautés diverses et changent leurs paysages sociaux, culturels et économiques. Au fur et à mesure que les jeunes nouveaux arrivants se réinstallent dans leurs nouvelles communautés, ils sont confrontés avec des défis et des opportunités uniques qui exigent de s'adapter à de nouvelles normes socioculturelles et de négocier leur rôle dans la transition vers l'âge adulte. L'article 1 explore comment l'agentivité d'un jeune peut influencer les pratiques de prise en charge des enfants dans les ménages d'immigrants. Des discussions de groupe ont été menées avec des jeunes (12 à 17 ans) (n=46) et des parents (n=19) immigrants de première et de deuxième génération originaires d'Asie du Sud, d'Amérique latine et des Caraïbes à Montréal. Les résultats suggèrent que les facteurs individuels, relationnels, environnementaux et culturels influencent la façon dont l'agentivité de l'enfant est négociée au sein de la famille. Cette étude invite les décideurs et les fournisseurs de services des nouvelles sociétés à tenir compte des perspectives des enfants et des parents immigrants afin d'acquérir une compréhension plus nuancée sur le plan culturel des éléments et des processus qui influencent les pratiques de garde et de supervision des enfants dans les familles immigrantes. L'article 2 décrit les expériences de jeunes nouveaux arrivants et de bénévoles participant à Say Ça !, un programme d'accueil communautaire, pendant la pandémie de COVID-19. Cette étude comprenait des journaux photographiques de six jeunes nouveaux arrivants (âgés de 12 à 17 ans) et en des discussions de groupe avec 11 bénévoles. Les résultats suggèrent que le programme en ligne individualisé intégrait leurs intérêts, encourageait l'expression de soi, offrait un soutien social et scolaire, et était une source de loisirs pendant la pandémie. Cette étude souligne le rôle des stratégies centrées sur l'enfant développées par les organisations communautaires locales pour adapter les services aux besoins

changeants de leur population dans le contexte d'une crise. Ensemble, les deux articles contribuent à une meilleure compréhension des réalités des jeunes immigrants et plaident pour que celles-ci soient prises en compte lors de l'élaboration de systèmes de soutien dans la nouvelle société qui répondent le mieux à leurs besoins.

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Contribution of Authors

Article 1 is based on data from Geographies of Care, a research project I coordinated for over eight months during which I attended focus group discussions, and transcribed and analyzed data. I wrote Article 1 with edits and input from Dr. Ruiz-Casares, the Principal Investigator of the project. Article 2 is based on data from a study I designed in collaboration with Say Ça!, the partner organization. I recruited participants with the support of Say Ça!, conducted group and individual interviews, coded, and analyzed the data, and wrote the manuscript. Dr. Ruiz-Casares provided guidance throughout the study and revised drafts of the manuscript.

Introduction

Worldwide, young people* are increasingly migrating to new societies†, building diverse communities and changing the social, cultural, and economic landscapes in the new homes where they resettle. In recent years, immigrants under the age of 25 years represented 9.5% of the total population of young people in this age group in Canada, accounting for almost one million young people (Canadian Institute of Child Health, 2018). Montreal, a multicultural city where one in every four people is an immigrant, continues to welcome high rates of international newcomers every year, a third of whom are under the age of 25 years (Statistics Canada, 2017).

As newcomer youth‡ begin to rebuild their lives and communities, they are faced with unique challenges and opportunities. Settling into a new society often means learning new languages and social norms (Asadi, 2014; Buchanan et al., 2018; Flint et al., 2019); adapting to different familial, socio-cultural, and institutional dynamics (Ayika et al., 2018; González et al., 2015; Selimos & Daniel, 2017); and building new support networks and meaningful relationships (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). As they transition into adulthood, newcomer youth are also in the process of forming their identity and negotiating their roles and responsibilities, both within the family and in the new society (Ayón et al., 2019; Shahsiah, 2006). Part of this process involves the challenging transition from school to work (Wilkinson et al., 2013), in a labour market where newcomer youth are faced with various structural barriers (Lauer et al., 2011), as well as the critical redefinition of their social engagement in the new society

* Throughout this thesis, the words children, youth, and young people will be used interchangeably in reference to any person under 18 years of age.

† The term *new society* is used in reference to a society in which a newcomer arrives and resettles into, commonly known as a host society. As a migrant myself, I would like my work to convey the meaning of a new society or a new home rather than a society that is hosting me.

‡ I define newcomer youth as 10 to 17-year-olds who have migrated to Canada in the past 5 years. Although their migration trajectories and resettlement process may vary from one to the next, newcomer youth share the common experience and challenges of arriving into and becoming part of a new society (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009).

(Kirpitchenko & Mansouri, 2014). Recognizing the complexity of newcomer youth's realities, drawn from their experiences, is imperative to understanding what contributes to their transition from exclusion to inclusion in the new society (Fangen et al., 2012).

Viewing newcomer youth through an ecological lens recognizes that individual, familial, community, and institutional supports are essential for a healthy resettlement of this population (Paat, 2013). Yet, for these supports to be relevant and effective, they must recognize and respond to the complex realities of newcomer youth. They must take into account specific challenges faced by this population and their families, such as limited support networks and available services, restricted material resources, discrimination and racism, language barriers, and the fear of their parenting practices being labelled 'inadequate' or 'neglectful' (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Klassen et al., 2020; Maiter & Stalker, 2011; Morantz et al., 2013; Salami et al., 2020; Sawrikar, 2014). By taking into account these challenges, service delivery organizations may be better equipped to respond effectively in rapidly changing contexts that may arise locally and globally (Gilmore et al., 2020). Moreover, these supports must be careful not to reproduce or intensify social inequalities (Selimos & George, 2018). Gaining a deeper understanding of the often overlooked experiences, perspectives, and needs of young people and their families is therefore necessary in research, policy, and programming.

This thesis is embedded in Human Rights and resilience frameworks that, together, recognize the right and capacity for newcomer youth to be social agents who act and contribute to their surroundings. Enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), children have the right to express their opinions freely and have these seriously considered when making decisions in matters that affect them. In striving for a healthy balance between the rights to participation and protection, child participation is often discussed in theory yet limited in practice

where child protection is prioritized (Collins, 2016). Upholding children's rights to participation is related to their healthy development and a crucial component of their protection (Lansdown, 2020).

A resilience framework highlights youths' strengths and recognizes their capacity to navigate resources and opportunities in culturally meaningful ways in response to adverse situations (Ungar, 2006). The recognition of children as social agents with capacity to act and contribute to their surroundings is crucial to understanding where they are at in order to plan and deliver services that best respond to their needs. As a result, this framework encourages services to adopt a strengths-based approach that promotes positive individual, social, and contextual factors that support youth in overcoming challenges and their possible negative effects (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005). Indeed, a resilience framework has been central in interventions and services that effectively support youth in overcoming challenges they face as newcomers in Canada (Este & Ngo, 2011).

This thesis centers on the experiences of newcomer youth as both a practical and ethical approach to understanding their realities. Though the perspective of first- and second-generation immigrant children and adult caregivers in Montreal, Article 1 explores how different perspectives of child agency can influence childcare practices in immigrant households. Findings from group discussions with young people and caregivers from different cultural groups are presented in narrative form and illustrated with eloquent quotes from participants. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, Article 2 explores newcomer youth's experiences participating in Say Ça!, a community-based welcome program in Montreal, and how their participation contributed to their sense of wellbeing and social connectedness. The study draws from photo journals and individual interviews with newcomer youth as well as group interviews with

program facilitators. As indicated in the thesis conclusion, the combined articles contribute to a deeper understanding of immigrant youth's realities and recognize the need for these to be considered when developing support systems in the new society that best respond to their needs.

Article 1*

Negotiating child agency in childcare practices among immigrant families

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Abstract

In the context of migration, different perspectives of child agency can influence childcare practices and may create tensions within families and in the host society. This study explores the individual, relational, environmental, and cultural factors that influence how child agency is understood and exercised within immigrant households. Focus group discussions were conducted with first- and second-generation immigrant children (12-17-year-old) (N=46) and parents (N=19) from South-Asia, Latin-America, and the Caribbean in Montreal. Our findings suggest that children exercise agency by taking actions to ensure their own safety and contributing to their families' needs. Moreover, we found that negotiating children's agency is influenced by the nature of the parent-child relationship, the material and social resources available to the family, and the perceived and lived experiences of authority and safety in the host society. This study advances our understanding of how immigrant children contribute to their families and the role that contextual factors play in shaping, promoting, and hindering child agency. Policy makers and service providers in host societies should consider the perspectives of immigrant children

* Article 1 has been accepted by the Journal of Child & Family Social Work.

and parents in order to develop a more culturally responsive understanding of the elements and processes that influence childcare and supervision practices of immigrant families.

Introduction

Growing levels of worldwide migration are transforming our demographic landscapes and with them our understanding of family, culture and society. In Canada, more than one in five people are born abroad and more than one in three children have at least one foreign-born parent (Statistics Canada, 2017), giving rise to an increasingly ethnoculturally diverse society. This paper looks at how immigrant families in Montreal negotiate how agency is expressed within their households and the various internal and external factors that influence this negotiation.

Resettling into a new society often drives new ways of functioning within immigrant families and with the larger society. Childcare and supervision practices are negotiated between child(ren) and parents, as well as between the family and host society (Ayón, Tran, & Nieri, 2019). Newcomer families face several challenges related to childcare and supervision during resettlement, such as limited support networks and available services (Putnam, 2007; Radey, 2015; Salami, Alaazi, Okeke-Ihejirika, et al., 2020); restricted social and material resources (Morantz et al., 2013); discrimination and racism (Beiser, 2005; Kirmayer et al., 2011); language barriers (Maiter & Stalker, 2011; Paat, 2013); and high levels of parenting stress (Liu, Zhai, & Gao, 2020; Yu & Singh, 2012). These challenges are often compounded by fear of parenting practices being labelled inadequate or neglectful and reported to child welfare authorities (Klassen et al., 2020; Sawrikar, 2014). Children play a significant part in the transitions immigrant families undergo to adapt to a new society and in the negotiation of the roles they play and the norms that shape their everyday life (Orellana, 2009; Sy & Romero, 2008).

The recognition of children's agency as their capacity to act and contribute to their surroundings as social agents is crucial to understanding children's roles within the family, as well as how these affect their protection and development. Drawing from work about migrant children by Thompson et al. (2019), this article defines agency as "an individual's intrinsic capacity for intentional behaviour developed within their environment(s) and subject to environmental influence" (p. 236), recognizing that the development and exercise of agency is shaped by the child and their surrounding actors and environments. Some authors argue for an 'ambiguous agency' that connects agents to their everyday actions and challenges normative conceptions of childhood and expected behaviours only to be demonstrated in appropriate spaces (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Payne, 2012). Social studies of childhood have increasingly recognized children as social agents who have the capacity to interpret situations, think critically and make choices in areas that matter to them. However, discussions about child agency are often localized to childhood studies and isolated from other related disciplines and broader social processes (Ansell, 2009; Hoikkala & Pösö, 2020). The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) states that children have the right to express their views freely and that these views should have weight in decisions of matters that affect them. In this light, children may be seen as valuable contributors to family relations (Katz, 2015) and family functioning (Chee, Goh, & Kuczynski, 2014). Moreover, strengthening child agency is not only related to healthy development (Gurdal, Lansford, & Sorbring, 2016) and crucial for children's self-esteem, but it is also a fundamental part of their protection (Lansdown, 2020).

Across cultures, children learn from and contribute to their families, communities, and society through their participation in these spheres (Abebe & Waters, 2016). The ways and extent to which they participate is shaped by cultural, social, and economic factors. Anchored in

extensive cross-cultural study, Lancy (2018) presents children as ‘helpers’ who ‘learn by doing’, participate in collective activities, interpret family needs, and autonomously provide assistance to their families and communities by assuming gradual tasks as they grow up. Children’s initiative and contributions are often valued and promoted by the family (Ames, 2013), who may either share responsibilities such as caring for family members (Lancy & Grove, 2011), or limit their involvement to ‘appropriate’ tasks delegated by the parents (Coppens et al., 2016). Children may express agency by caring for themselves and others, for instance when they are home alone (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2012). This form of participation requires a negotiation between the child’s own needs and those of their family (Riley & Steinberg, 2004). Taking initiative and making valuable contributions to the family may facilitate children’s sense of responsibility and self-worth (Alcalá et al., 2014). Studies have shown that children are aware of how their help contributes to the collective wellbeing of their families and their feeling of belonging (Ames, 2013), and are often eager to collaborate (Coppens & Alcalá, 2015).

In the context of migration, recognizing children as social agents and centering their experiences in decisions that affect them is essential to their protection in the host society (Crawley, 2010). A growing literature on the agency of migrant children suggests the complexity and diversity of lived experiences, and recognizes that local constructions of childhood and child agency may undermine or promote children’s agentic capacities (Hoang & Yeoh, 2015; Orgocka, 2012). Migrant children may express their agency by developing personal strategies (Thompson et al., 2019), influencing decision-making processes within their families (Medvedeva, 2012), and assuming the role of a language broker when translating for their parents (Orellana, 2009).

This article presents data from Geographies of Care, a multisite study about childcare practices and (in)adequate supervision across cultures in the province of Quebec. The study

gathered perspectives of child agency in the context of supervision from children, parents, and family-serving professionals.

Method

Setting, participants, and recruitment

Study participants were first- and second-generation immigrants either born or with parents born in South-Asia (SA), Latin-America (LA), and the Caribbean (CA); fluent in English and/or French; and currently living in Montreal, a multicultural city and one of the top three destinations in Canada for international migration. In 2016, 23% of the total population in private households in the city were racialized minorities (Statistics Canada, 2015) and 26% and 16% were first- and second-generation immigrants, respectively. Half of immigrants born overseas originated from Asia (28% of all immigrants) and the Americas (22%). Between 2011 and 2016, 19% of immigrants were under 15 years old (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Most children in the study were born in Montreal (N=24) while a few had migrated from other cities in Canada (N=2), from other countries (N=18), or did not provide this information (N=2). Adult participants were primary caregivers/parents of at least one child under 18 years. They were first-generation immigrants, had between one and five children and lived in Quebec for at least 5 years. Children and adults were recruited through community-based organizations serving these populations in Montreal. Unrelated participants were recruited to gain a more diverse representation of immigrant families. Table 1 shows the participant demographic characteristics.

Table 1 – Participant demographic characteristics.

	Children	Caregivers
Number of participants	46	19
Gender		
Female	17	17
Male	29	2
Countries of origin	Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, India, Jamaica, Mexico, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, USA	Barbados, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad, USA, Venezuela

Measures and procedures

A total of seven focus groups discussions (FGD) took place, five with children and two with caregivers (average of 9-10 participants each). FGD are an effective interviewing method to document a range of perspectives and can be valuable with hard-to-reach groups such as ethnic minorities and children (Carey & Asbury, 2016). FGD were conducted in quiet spaces at community-based organizations serving these populations and in the lead researcher's office. Trained graduate and postdoctoral researchers facilitated interviews and took notes. FGD took place in English and Spanish with participants from similar ethno-cultural communities and two research team members. FGD lasted approximately one hour with children and an hour and a half with adults. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and from parents of children under 14 years.

Keeping in mind both their communities of origin and the host society, participants were asked about childcare beliefs and practices as well as child supervision challenges and consequences. The interviewers probed for variation in responses by introducing individual and contextual factors such as child age, sex, and level of ability. All participants were asked to

consider the appropriateness of four vignettes describing situations of children at various ages assuming tasks (e.g., walking home from school, staying home while parents do grocery shopping or caring for a grandparent with reduced mobility) without adult supervision. During the FGD, a form was distributed listing tasks, such as caring for siblings, cooking or earning money. Participants were asked to discuss by which age a child can start doing these tasks without adult supervision.

Analysis

The discussions were audio-recorded with permission from participants, transcribed verbatim, translated to English, denominalized with pseudonyms, and coded thematically by two researchers using NVivo 11. The researchers used open coding to develop a preliminary codebook based on themes derived from the interview protocol (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Codes were grouped into categories and subcategories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The initial codebook was applied to two transcripts by two researchers and modified through an iterative coding process. Coding discrepancies were discussed with the principal investigator until an agreement was reached. The finalized codebook was then applied to all transcripts. Detailed notes taken during FGD were consulted during the analysis for non-verbal information. Codes were contrasted across groups (children and adults) to identify similarities and differences in understandings of agency in the context of child supervision at the individual, family, and community levels.

Ethical considerations

Building relationships based on trust and respect with the community was an integral part of the research project. An Advisory Committee, consisting of community leaders and representatives from various professions, was formed and consulted throughout the project for appropriateness and feasibility of the study. The study received ethics approval from [removed for anonymity].

Results

In the following section we discuss individual, relational, environmental and cultural factors that influence how immigrant families may understand, promote, and hinder child agency.

Children as agents

Children assessing risk and ensuring their safety

Children from all five FGD assessed potential risks in various situations of lack of supervision and thought critically about the actions required to ensure safety. They discussed factors such as age and maturity of the child; activities done while unsupervised; and location, duration, and frequency of the situation. Age, maturity and level of ability of both child-caregiver and child(ren) cared for were considered when children stay home alone caring for their siblings because, in the words of an 18-year-old girl from SA, “if you can’t take care of yourself, you can’t take care of someone else.” Similarly, a boy spoke about the age at which children are able to think critically when traveling alone:

Let’s say [children] get lost while taking [public transport] – when you’re 13-14 [years old], you have the capability of critical thinking and trying to find a way back, that you don’t have necessarily when you’re younger. So, in general, at 13-14 you should be able to find your way around. (16-year-old, SA)

The activities and equipment children engage with while unsupervised were also considered when assessing risk, such as cutting grass with an old machine or cooking food in the oven.

Children also considered time of day, location, duration, and frequency of the situation as contextual factors that may compromise their safety. For instance, in a discussion about playing in the park unsupervised, one participant shared that there was a difference between a fenced backyard and the open street. Another 17-year-old girl felt that a 4- or 5-year-old “can start

walking and practicing in the backyard” unsupervised because “it’s your own house and you’re safe”. More generally, children noted that “it depends on the neighbourhood. (...) If there are a lot of houses close by and (...) the neighbours are good, I guess you can leave them at home [alone]”. In several FGD, participants agreed that the length of time a child would be left unsupervised should also be considered. For example, a 10-year-old might lack the necessary patience and skills to take care of her two younger siblings for any longer than “a short time, like 30 minutes”. Children were aware of unexpected situations and injuries that can occur when children are left unsupervised such as “burn the house”, “burn themselves”, or, more generally, “put themselves in danger”, while recognizing the risk of not being prepared to respond to these situations.

Adults also recognized children’s abilities to assess risk and take actions to ensure their own safety when unsupervised. Echoing children’s views, adults saw importance in the age and maturity of both the child caregiver and the child being cared for. Parents also commented on the type of activities done by children while unsupervised (e.g., cooking, caring for siblings or running errands) and the need to assess each child’s capabilities separately as even two siblings may not be capable of the same tasks upon reaching a certain age. On occasion, children’s diverse yet complementing capacities reassured parents, such as the following mother reflecting on when she left her children home alone:

There are examples of my daughter like, winter, I’m going to the store. Not far. My 8-year-old daughter (...) I could trust her with my baby more than someone older than her. So, I know she can hold the baby, very young. My 12-year-old son (...) I wouldn’t leave him with the baby. But I leave him, in case like, if there’s a fire, I know that he could get them out. But my daughter will be the one that would hold the baby. (parent, CA)

Adults also commented on contextual factors, such as location, duration and level of community engagement in childcare. In one FGD, parents agreed that, in the Caribbean, 6-year-olds are able to walk to school and run small errands unsupervised, adding that they would feel more comfortable if their child was accompanied by other children. Several adults commented on the amount of time the children would be left unsupervised. Compared to their country of origin, one parent said that “here [in Montreal], it’s always locked in (...) but home [in the Caribbean] the child is always out”. Similarly, another parent commented:

In the winter, you feel almost like you’re trapped. And the difference here [in Montreal] is because you cannot let your kids just run outside by themselves. (...) In Barbados, (...) You go out and you come back at whatever time. Here, I would not let my son just wander out to the park [alone]. (mother, CA)

Whereas the community back home provided “a sense of protection,” one parent explained how they “don’t have that sense here, that people in the community are gonna look out for your child” (father, CA).

Children contributing to the family

Children also exercise their agency by assuming responsibilities at home that contribute to the needs of the family, such as taking care of siblings or completing house chores. For instance, children in several FGD described an “unspoken rule”, namely parents often entrust their older child to take care of younger ones rather than “pay other people to watch their kids.” In the words of a child:

I helped my mom take care of my little brother. (...) I used to go out with my little brother when he was 2 years old [and I was 7]. I was with him and not with my mother or no one else. (16-year-old girl, LA)

At times, taking care of their siblings was not considered to be any different than spending time with them (e.g., when children walk home unsupervised after school with their siblings).

According to children, some parents may entrust older children to care for younger ones while others may decide this is not appropriate. Children disclosed that these decisions may be based on children's characteristics such as "responsibility, punctuality, or the connection in between children" (16-year-old boy, SA). Variation in children's experiences was illustrated by another boy:

I'm still not allowed to take care of [my 11-year-old sister] alone. However, when I was younger, my cousin who is two years older than me used to just watch over me. (...) So, it's more of like a parent's feeling over the situation. For example, my parents are over-protective. So, they still don't let me and I'm 16. But my aunt for example, is very loose.

She'll let her children take care of themselves. (16-year-old, SA)

Beyond caring for younger siblings, children can also contribute to their families by performing other household tasks and earning money. When discussing the appropriate age to care for siblings, one girl from the Caribbean described her situation upon migrating to Canada as a 7-year-old:

My mom was hardly home (...) I took care of my sister (...) I was the only one making money, washing their clothes, cooking for young people in the house (...), I was 7! And what age am I now? Eighteen and I still do that same shit.

Other children in the group encouraged her and agreed with her experiences, further contrasting the ways in which children contribute to their families in the countries of origin vs. in Montreal, as children from two FGD suggest in the following excerpts:

Boy: Back [in CA] it's basically the dad or mom [who takes care of the children], but if it's up here [in Montreal] and it's a little bit harder, it's basically the oldest sibling who has to take care of [the younger children].

Girl: In the Caribbean, when I was raised there, it was me being a kid – if I go back there now I would be a kid. But here, I have to give that mother role or that grown woman role, as in like at home, I have to be the mother to my sisters, when my mom is not home. (...)

And, so say school, I have to be a really good role model to my sisters.

Adults generally agreed that their children contribute to the family by looking out for their siblings and cooking for the family. A father described the responsibilities that children may assume in the Caribbean: “In my neighbourhood, by the time they hit ten [years of age], they know how to change a diaper, look after brothers and sisters. (...) if dirty, watch them, bathe them.” Even in Montreal, another mother described how her nine-year-old daughter contributes by making dinner for the family.

Parents' roles and child agency

Promoting child agency as a gradual process

Participants shared their understanding of developing the ability to interpret situations and make decisions as a gradual process that requires learning from taking small risks under supportive conditions. Children suggested that sometimes it is parents who decide which risks can be taken and to what extent (e.g., at what age children can use the stove). Providing children with these meaningful opportunities are ways in which adults may promote the development of a child's ability to act. For instance, one boy shared that getting lost while taking public transport was a learning experience for him, a view shared by other children in the group:

My dad had told that he would go with me, and I kept on saying ‘No, I can go alone.’ And I got lost. I didn’t know where to go. And then I remembered my dad and wished he was with me. Then I started asking people how to find my way home, I was scared and when I arrived home I was crying and I told him he was right and he should have come with me.

(15-year-old, LA)

Cooking unsupervised was a common example used to illustrate how child agency is developed gradually. Participants from several FGD described how children are able to prepare increasingly complex meals, often requiring using more kitchen appliances, as they get older. One child participant explained that while he was able to prepare “a snack of something quick” for himself at the age of 12, by 16 he was able to prepare a full meal for his family.

How parents promote child agency

Children learned to care for themselves and others from their parents and through babysitting extra-curricular courses that promote leadership in child caregiving and first aid training to 11 to 14-year-olds (Canadian Red Cross, 2021). They agreed that it was common for parents to offer support to children when they are home alone by providing a phone number they could call in an emergency, preparing food for them ahead of time, and setting rules (e.g., no cooking allowed). Children appreciated these learning opportunities to develop autonomy.

However, children also suggested that the process of growing up includes children actively and critically deciding how and to what extent they need external support:

In certain situations, you need to be able to count on your parents. (...) But there are other situations in which you don’t need that. You tell yourself ‘I am not 5 years old anymore’, when you reach a certain age you know that you don’t need the help even if it’s offered to you. (17-year-old boy, LA)

Moreover, parental support may be experienced as overprotection and, in some cases, it may hinder rather than promote agency. One 16-year-old boy shared that his parents were “overprotective” for not allowing him to do certain things that other children did at his age, such as leaving the house alone. Other perspectives on parental support potentially limiting agency were provided by three children from Latin-America:

12-year-old boy: If you are 16 years old it is normal that your parents won’t worry about you because they know you will be okay.

12-year-old boy: But you can’t never know for sure, because there are very overprotective parents. They are too worried all the time because they care a lot about their child. (...)

16-year-old girl: I am 16 and they always call me. Sometimes my mom calls my cellphone and she thinks I’m out or something and she calls the house phone so that I will pick it up.

Several adult participants described how they gave their children responsibilities starting at a young age—“In that way, [the child] gains life experience” and “We teach our kids to help out the little ones. So even if it’s like changing diapers, making milk, they know how to do it... it’s not that they don’t know. We educate them.” Other adults in the group supported his ideas. By teaching children to be independent, parents prepared them to care for other children and assume unsupervised house responsibilities. One mother said:

It is important that you teach your children to be mature since they are very young. (...) they will need to know how to cook, and wash and they will need to know how to study. They need to know how to manage themselves. (...) You want your children to grow and develop and be independent. (LA)

Additionally, Caribbean parents discussed how they teach their children to assume responsibilities at home in a way that was age appropriate and fun for the child. As two adults described: “You teach playing”, “not as a game but as a responsibility.”

Parents may also promote agency by providing children with opportunities and “secure spaces” to take small risks. In fact, there was a shared view that parents are responsible not only for the material needs of the child but for fostering healthy environments where children can learn to be independent. Notably, adults also commented on parental support turning into overprotection, acknowledging that “there’s a point that overprotection prevents the child from growing up”. Parents spoke to the need for balance between supervision and providing “spaces for the child to play, and to develop her curiosity and learn” suggesting children “need to have their space. You need to be close. Not too close that they will fall on you and not as far as to not be able to help them if they need” (LA).

The parent-child relationship

The nature of the child-parent relationship, based on level of “trust”, “communication”, and perceived child sense of “responsibility”, influences how child agency is negotiated within the family. Several children agreed that if a parent “knows his child very well, then he knows of what the child is capable of or not.” For instance, while discussing whether it is appropriate for a ten-year-old girl to care for her 5 and 3-year-old siblings when home alone, a 17-year-old boy considered that “if [the parents] trust their child, it will be okay. I think at ten years, they will know their child well enough to let them or not” (SA). Other participants agreed with this statement, as long as the parents were only gone for a short period of time.

Sociocultural effects on child agency

Material and social resources available to the family

The material and social resources available to the family may influence how children make decisions and the roles they assume within their household. First, in contrast with their countries of origin, child and adult participants recognized the need for both parents to have full-time employment in Montreal and how this affected the distribution of responsibilities within the family, including taking care of children. One mother, for instance, described how she counted on her children to help her at home:

When I'm at work my kids have the responsibility of helping me. (...) If I'm gonna work 7 days a week. You need to help me. If you don't want to help me, I'm gonna work five days, and then you work weekends to help out. They said 'Okay, mom. We'll help out at home.' (...) I know the system here is different than it is at home, but you have to tell your kids you expect from them nothing but the best. (...) You can't be working everyday 8 hours and you have to pay babysitter when you have a son who's 17 or 18.

(CA)

On occasion, a mother having to take up a job means children spend time home alone. Whereas some adults verbalized their fear that this would be “dangerous”, others considered children spending time home alone and taking up household responsibilities to be an appropriate learning opportunity. This was often misunderstood by child protection services as neglect, and thus parents felt the need to educate youth protection “because for us, it's normal. And the way of doing things and what we think is proper because we're also teaching our children, at the same time, to be responsible, for themselves” (mother, AC).

Second, children and adults highlighted the role of the extended family and community in raising children, frequently commenting on the limited support networks in the host society. The absence of such community and family support in Montreal compared to the countries of origin,

may lead children to take on tasks and responsibilities otherwise assumed by adults before migration. For instance, a 7-year-old was described to take care of her little sister when her mother did groceries because they had “no family here.”

Cultural values in childcare practices

Shaped by experiences as immigrants, values held by the parents and the children influence the negotiation of how children make decisions and contribute to their families within the new society. One boy explained his parents’ tendency to be overprotective was a result of their cultural upbringing compounded to a lack trust in the host society:

My friends for example, are often way freer to do what they want compared to me. Even though we’re basically the same age. So, I find that they’re [respondent’s parents] just over-protective, but that’s just a force of habit. Because they’ve suffered the same way.

They’ve been through the same thing. (16-year-old, SA).

At times, these differences in values resulted in disagreements about how decisions were made within the family. For instance, in a discussion about children earning money to buy their own things, a 16-year-old from South-Asia described how his parents trusted him to work in the family company. However, they did not allow him to have control over the money he earned, which he questioned. While one mother from Latin-America shared that in Quebec “any child that makes their own money will feel free” most adults agreed that children are not expected to earn money to buy their own things or contribute to the family; rather, parents provide for them.

Adults also discussed how they enforce “their way of living” (i.e., cultural values and practices from their country of origin) at home rather than the Quebec norms. For instance, one mother from Latin-America shared:

You [children] can adapt to the norms and ways of behaving of this country, until a certain extent. But inside this house, I will not tolerate any of that. You will behave as I say and in the house you need to respect me and obey me.

Participants' perspectives on authority and safety, based on cultural values, often varied across countries of origin and age differences (for children), and influenced how children's agency unfolded within the family in the host society. For example, compared to their countries of origin, both children and adult participants perceived that in Montreal children have more freedom to express themselves and more influence in decisions that affect them while adults (i.e., parents and teachers) have less authority over children. Children felt some freedom in choosing what they disclose to their parents, admitting to not always sharing negative incidents at school with their parents: "[parents] don't know if I was hit by others or if the other children did something to me. They still think that it is safe" (17-year-old boy, LA). In the context of healthcare, caregivers faced difficulties adjusting to local norms about health-related decisions. One mother described her struggle this way:

There are things that are hard to incorporate to your life, to accept that they are different. For example, the 'assurance maladie' [Quebec healthcare system], which at 14 years old gives children the right to make their own decision. (...) you can't interfere with that anymore. He has a right and if he wants to share the information with you then that's okay but if not, then he doesn't. (...) The law doesn't require him to tell me. (...) But if I am his mother, I have a right to know what he has, what is wrong with him. (mother, LA)

Children and adults commented on how certain cultural practices may be misunderstood as neglect in the host society and raised questions about the understanding of neglect. In this line, one adult explained:

We don't neglect our children here, and yet they label us as we neglect our children. We provide for our children; we give them food and shelter. (...) But there [in Montreal], it's neglect. Back home, they don't give them love, they don't give them food, they don't give them shelter... They don't support the child. (...) That's neglect. We don't do that here! This is a different neglect here and neglect there. So, what's the definition to it for them? (father, CA)

Discussion

This paper explores immigrant children and adults' views and experiences of childcare and other household contributions in Montreal and how those promote or hinder child agency. Several factors influence how agency is negotiated within immigrant families in the host society. Abebe (2019) advocates going beyond the recognition of children as social agents and looking into the everyday instances of where and how their "agency unfolds." He views agency as interdependent, recognizing the relationships and context that shape children's everyday activities and social roles, as well as found on a continuum, as a dynamic and non-linear process involving different forms and degrees of expression over time and in varying contexts. Thus, participants in our study described child agency unfolding as a gradual process that requires learning from taking small risks with guidance. During this learning process, children are active in the negotiation of their autonomy and in how household tasks are delegated and completed (Solberg, 2015). This negotiation between family members influences how decisions are made within the household and has the capacity to transform children both in the short and long term (Abebe, 2019). A negotiated interdependence may help better understand the decisions children make as they transition roles within the family, and make decisions to balance personal needs with family responsibilities (Punch, 2002).

Our study describes examples of everyday processes in which children exercise their agency such as by assessing risks when they are home alone and making decisions to preserve their safety, in line with other studies (Ruiz-Casares & Rousseau, 2010). Echoing previous research, participants recognized the influence of factors such as age and maturity of the child (Lamb & Ahnert, 2007), nature of activities done while unsupervised (Mack, Dellinger, & West, 2012), and location, duration and frequency of the situation (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2012). Notably, research has identified that many children have the ability to, are comfortable with, and readily assume roles of caring for themselves and others, as well as household responsibilities, when home alone (Watkins, Law, & Barwick, 2019). Sibling caretaking is a cross-cultural practice related to socially constructed roles based on the families' diverse life experiences (Hafford, 2010). Caring for siblings may play an important role in healthy child development for the caretaker child as well as familial cohesion, yet in certain cases, it may pose risks and compromise the safety of the children. In low- and middle-income countries, factors such as gender, age, birth order and sibling composition have been found to play a role in how these household responsibilities are distributed (Punch, 2001). Enacting child agency may be related less to the person's age and more to a perceived sense of ability and confidence (Robson, Bell, & Klocker, 2007), as our findings illustrate. Moreover, some children act out or engage in risky behaviors when unsupervised (Ruiz-Casares & Heymann, 2009; Ruiz-Casares, Trocmé, & Fallon, 2012), suggesting that not all children are able to safely stay home alone, regardless of age. Caregivers are often best positioned to assess situations based on their close knowledge of each child's strengths and challenges, while paying attention not to overprotect children. In our study, children recognized that certain responsibilities are best assumed by adults because of their assumed competency or lack thereof in children, yet they also reminded us of the value of

their views in deciding if and when children should assume certain responsibilities when home alone, reflecting previous studies (Watkins, Law, & Barwick, 2019).

An ecological systems approach may be helpful in understanding family mechanisms and immigrant children's realities and can better inform professional practice when working with this population (Paat, 2013). The most immediate environment surrounding a child includes personal relationships developed within the home. Our findings suggest that these relationships influence how children contribute to their households and negotiate their agency. This resonates with McLaughlin (2020), who argues for a relational autonomy that repositions capacity and agency not as a property of the individual but as grounded in their relationships. Our study describes parents' roles in promoting child agency and how the nature of the parent-child relationships influences children's expressions of agency. Immigrant children and parents recognized and valued the roles children assumed within the family, and viewed children as key members contributing to the functioning of the household, reflecting previous findings (Ames, 2013; Coppens et al., 2016). Thus, agency is exercised not only in the action of assuming household tasks but in how these actions are recognized within families. Moreover, our findings show that how parents' view their children's capacities informs the nature of the parent-child relationship and the extent to which parents promote child agency. Parents who consider their children to be capable of assuming these tasks are likely to encourage opportunities for children to further develop these capacities, and, in so doing, influence the children's own views of their abilities (Watkins, Law, & Barwick, 2019). By contributing to the household tasks, not only may children gain autonomy within the family (Solberg, 2015), but also a sense of responsibility and self-worth (Alcalá et al., 2014). This is the case especially when the contributions are initiated by the children and done with no adult supervision (Alcalá et al., 2014; Solberg, 2015).

The concept of situated agency recognizes that child agency is embedded within social, cultural, economic, and material contexts generated by geographical and social boundaries (Choi, Yeoh, & Lam, 2019). Our participants' varying understandings and expectations of child autonomy bring to light how these situated factors influence the ways in which child agency is promoted and expressed in immigrant families. For instance, we found differences in the roles (actual or perceived) children assume within their families in the host society compared to the country of origin, including household responsibilities that would otherwise be done by an adult before migration or during visits to the country of origin after migration. This may be partly explained by what Robson, Bell, and Klocker (2007) call 'constrained contexts' which influence the way agency is expressed within the household. These constrained contexts may include parental employment, parenting strategies, social support networks, and availability of extended family, that may differ from situations in the country of origin (Ayón, Tran, & Nieri, 2019; Proctor & Dubowitz, 2014). Our data also revealed differences in values held by the parents, the children, or the host society. These differences, less attributed to a specific culture than to the experience of cultural difference the new country, can result in tension between family members (Salami, Alaazi, Yohani, et al., 2020) and between family and the host society (Gatwiri & Anderson, 2020), and in turn influence how children participate within the family and make their own decisions. Indeed, youth who maintain a sense of their cultural identity while forming ties with the host society tend to show more positive adaptation outcomes (Berry et al., 2006).

Participants disclosed some disagreements in childcare practices, which showcases the nuanced and varied perspectives of children and caregivers within similar contexts. Whether conforming to or defying and renegotiating adult expectations, both are forms of agency as children interpret, ponder, and make a choice (Bell, 2007). In the context of immigrant families,

intergenerational tensions frequently emerge as youth and parents adapt and negotiate parenting strategies that may differ from the country of origin and the host society (Cook & Waite, 2016; Li & Warner, 2015; Turjanmaa & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2020). As some participants indicated, certain cultural practices may be misunderstood as neglect in the host society (Sawrikar, 2014) and lead to over-reporting of racial and ethnic minorities to child protection services, including in Canada (Euser et al., 2011; Trocmé, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004).

Implications

Society's perceptions of children as dependent may contribute to their vulnerability and thus, strengthening child agency and participation can contribute to combatting child abuse and neglect (Lansdown, 2020) and enhancing children's subjective wellbeing (González et al., 2015). Parents in our study recognized the need for a balance between supervision and autonomy, moving away from overprotection and striving for a healthy balance between the rights to participation and protection (UNGA, 1989). Overlooking how "intimately interrelated" factors may influence children's expressions of agency can result in migrant parents being labelled as neglectful (Klassen et al., 2020) and in an incomplete representation of immigrant children in youth protection services (Paat, 2013). To improve culturally-sensitive services in the host society, decision makers and service providers should consider the perspectives of immigrant children and parents on the factors that influence supervision and childcare practices in their families as well as on reconceptualizations of neglect. For example, youth protection services can prioritize educating migrant families about cultural norms and strategies that reduce obstacles in childcare (Klassen et al., 2020), as well as institutional procedures that allow children to fully articulate their experiences and that recognize them as credible sources of information (Crawley, 2010).

We acknowledge several limitations of our study. Language selection criteria and self-selection bias among study participants may have resulted in the exclusion of participants from different socio-demographic background (e.g., migrants without a good command of English, French, or Spanish may have different perspectives on child agency and supervision, and child participants may have been particularly mature and responsible). Aggregating participants across region of origin and age groups may have placed disproportional weight on responses from certain groups, over-homogenized their experiences, and hidden cultural variations, making it unclear how these findings will generalize to other immigrant individuals and families. Future studies should contrast the perspectives of child agency between children and parents within the same household in a larger sample to gain a deeper understanding of the concept. Not specifying the type of immigrants in our study could have overshadowed how differences in migration trajectories influence childcare practices and family resources (Wall & Jose, 2004). Limited socio-demographic information was collected, thus hindering our ability to draw conclusions more broadly or across groups. Future research should look at the influence of gender and socio-economic factors to build upon the findings of this study. Social desirability bias (Fisher, 1993) may have led some participants to conform to social norms out of peer pressure or fear to describe legally and socially unacceptable practices in Canada such as leaving children home alone unsupervised. Nonetheless, the candidness of some of the quotes reveal that a safe space was created, and this bias minimized during data collection.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, this study advances our understanding of child caregiving and other contributions by immigrant children and the role that these contextual factors play in understanding, promoting, and hindering child agency. A range of cultural practices among

immigrant parents to teach and provide opportunities for children to exercise agency are embedded within a set of norms and values in the host society. These include individual (e.g. maturity of child), relational (e.g. relationship with parents), environmental (e.g. parental employment, social resources) and cultural (e.g. values in childcare practices) factors or constraints. To adequately respond to children's supervisory needs and inform local family-support services, a detailed analysis of the everyday agency experiences and support networks of both children and parents from their own perspectives and within normative and cultural contexts is crucial.

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Bridge

Article 1 explored some of the individual, relational, environmental, and cultural factors that may influence how child agency is understood and exercised within immigrant households in Montreal, and how, in turn, these different views of child agency may influence childcare practices in these contexts. This study advances our understanding of how immigrant children contribute to their families and the role that contextual factors play in shaping, promoting, and hindering child agency. In order to effectively support immigrant families in the new society, policy makers and service providers need to better understand their realities and perspectives, and consider these in decisions about matters that concern them. An example of this implication is further explored in Article 2, which describes the experiences of newcomer youth and program facilitators participating in Say Ça!, a community-based welcome program, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Community-based support plays an important role in the resettlement of newcomer youth and their families. Yet, little is known about the key elements that facilitate their engagement and overall wellbeing from the perspective of the service users, especially in online service delivery during a pandemic. Article 2 illustrates how considering the perspectives of newcomer youth can benefit program development and delivery, as well as shape public discourse and policies to best support youth in their process of resettlement.

Article 2

“I wish every day was Saturday”: Newcomer youth and program facilitators’ experiences of a community-based resettlement program during the COVID-19 pandemic in Montreal

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Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many crucial services for youth shifted to online delivery. Yet, little is known about the processes of providing online support to newcomer youth from the perspective of the service users. Say Ça! is a community-based organization in Montreal that supports newcomer youth through language tutoring and cultural activities. Photo journals by six newcomer 12-17-year-olds and group interviews with 11 program facilitators explored how the pandemic affected the youth’s experiences participating in Say Ça!. Findings highlight key elements of online learning program delivery essential to the youth’s engagement during the pandemic. Notably, adopting a *relationship-centered approach* that strengthened one-on-one tutor-youth relationships and a *youth-centered approach* that offered a space of self-expression, academic support and leisure parting from the youth’s interests. Strategies developed by community-engaged organizations are essential to develop adequate services that respond to the changing needs of their populations in the context of a crisis.

Introduction

Newcomer youth (i.e. individuals under 24 years who have lived in Canada for less than 5 years, (Statistics Canada, 2011)) have been uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Certain difficulties that arise from settling into a new society, such as socializing, learning a language and integrating at school, as well as personal and social tensions negotiated in entering adulthood, have been amplified in this context (Cholera et al., 2020). Community-based programs are an important point of contact between immigrant families and the new society, as they provide information and other services to support the wellbeing and resettlement of newcomer youth (Betancourt et al., 2015). Physical distancing measures during the pandemic required community and institutional support for newcomer youth to stop in-person services in Montreal. As a result, many organizations in the city shifted to delivering services online. This study explored the experiences of newcomer youth participating in Say Ça!, a community-based organization, focusing on the key elements that facilitated their engagement and overall wellbeing during the pandemic.

Newcomer youth and COVID-19

In March 2020, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) a global pandemic (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). To reduce the transmission of the virus, the provincial Government of Québec in Canada declared a public health emergency and implemented physical distancing measures on 13 March 2020. These measures included self-isolation at the individual level, as well as school, extracurricular and community-based program closures (Government of Quebec, 2020a). Families living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Montreal were at particularly at risk to the virus due to a higher number of essential workers, overcrowded housing, and little access to outdoor spaces (Government of Quebec, 2020b). The physical

distancing measures also uniquely affected youth, as their primary social environments were closed or moved online (Orgilés et al., 2020). Challenges that newcomer youth already face in resettling in a new society, such as social isolation, academic stress, reduced mental health and limited support networks and access to services, were further amplified by the pandemic (Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network, 2020). Additionally, researchers in Montreal warned that during the pandemic, youth in the city may have reduced access to structured support, may be stuck in unhealthy family settings, and relationships with peers may be limited to virtual spaces that are commonly unsupervised (Rousseau & Miconi, 2020). Globally, there is a call to action for the inclusion of migrants and refugees in the COVID-19 response (Orcutt et al., 2020).

Migration and resettlement in Montreal

International migration continues to play a foundational role in Montreal, a city where immigrants make up almost a quarter of the population (Statistics Canada, 2017). Young people under the age of 25, almost a third of recent migrants (Statistics Canada, 2017), have particular needs as they adapt to a new society, while at the same time developing their own identity and negotiating their roles within their families and communities (Denov & Blanchet-Cohen, 2016; Hamilton, 2010). In Quebec, the Ministry of Immigration and Cultural Communities encourages decentralization and partnerships across the public, private, and community sectors that play a role in the integration of newcomers (Tremblay, 2012). Community and school-based welcome programs are an important point of contact between immigrant families and the host society, thus facilitating the provision of interventions and resources to migrant youth (Symons & Ponzio, 2019). This is particularly relevant considering that immigrant families tend to underuse services compared to those who are Canadian-born (Whitley et al., 2006). Some of the most needed

services are language learning and academic support (Selimos & Daniel, 2017), while others provide hubs for interaction and social connection (Sánchez-Aragón et al., 2020). Community initiatives that support newcomer youth by recognizing and responding to their complex identities and long-term goals may enhance their feelings of belonging and social inclusion (Selimos & George, 2018). Furthermore, applying a systems approach that considers youth-to-youth peer mentoring can improve their self-esteem (Khanlou et al., 2014).

Welcome programs for newcomer youth

A review of community-based programs supporting ethnocultural youth and families in Canada found that psycho-educational, information-based workshops, support groups and innovative approaches, such as arts and mentorships, were common delivery methods (Ruiz-Casares et al., 2015). A scoping review of mental health interventions for immigrant-refuge children and youth living in Canada found that collaboration between schools, communities and families are crucial to delivering comprehensive interventions (Herati & Meyer, 2020). In Canada, services for newcomer youth tend to occur through schools, community organizations and partnerships between both (Blanchet-Cohen & Reilly, 2017; Robinson et al., 2019; Rousseau et al., 2014). However, there are often gaps between the needs of newcomers and the services available to them, for example limited information and outreach of interventions, difference between needs and offerings, as well as lack of trust in formal services (Francis & Yan, 2016). Closer collaborations across sectors may help in closing that gap (Li et al., 2017). Some programs that promote resilience for newcomer youth consider ways of engaging the family and the community as well as ensuring access to materials (Crooks et al., 2020). During the pandemic, studies conducted in Europe have shown that digital interventions can help youth mitigate negative psychological symptoms intensified by the pandemic (Rauschenberg et al., 2021).

Remote interventions have also provided access to accurate information and to online psychological support to migrant youth and their families (Endale et al., 2020). However, little is known about the processes and perceived effects of providing community-based online support for youth during a pandemic from the perspective of the service users.

This paper explores the perspectives of newcomer youth and program facilitators to understand how they experienced participating in Say Ça! during the pandemic, and how the youth's participation contributed to their wellbeing. In adopting a youth resilience framework, this study emphasizes positive individual, social, and contextual factors that help youth overcome possible negative effects of migration (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Ungar, 2006). As such, a resilience framework sees youth as active agents in their lives rather than victims of their situation and underscores the potential of social, mental health, education, justice-oriented interventions for newcomer youth (Este & Ngo, 2011).

Method

Setting and participants

Say Ça! is a volunteer-run, youth-for-youth community-based organization in Montreal that supports newcomer youth through free language tutoring and group cultural activities. Every Saturday morning, about 20 newcomer youth, aged 10 to 17 years, and tutors meet for an hour of one-on-one tutoring followed by an hour of group cultural activities. Volunteers at Say Ça! assume the roles of tutors and program coordinators. In March 2020, responding to physical distancing measures, Say Ça! shifted to online delivery of their program.

Table 1. Participant demographics and data collection methods.

	Number of participants	Countries of origin	Gender	Age (years)	Methodological activities
Youth	6	Cameroon, Chad, Lebanon, Uganda, and Venezuela	4 female 2 male	11 to 17	Photo journals & individual interviews
Program facilitators	11	Canada (Montreal), Colombia, Egypt, France, Iran, Peru and Syria	7 female 4 male	20 to 35	Focus group discussions

At the beginning of the study, youth participants had been living in the Greater Montreal metropolitan area between 7 months and 4 years and had attended weekly Saturday sessions with Say Ça! for at least four months. Volunteer participants had been a part of the program for at least one year and assumed the roles of tutors and program coordinators. Table 1 shows participant demographics.

Measures and procedures

Youth (n=6) participated in photo journals and individual interviews and volunteers (n=11[§]) participated in focus group discussions (FGD). All youth participating in the Say Ça! program were invited to take part in a photo journal activity to document their experiences participating in the tutoring program before and during the pandemic. With the support of Say Ça!, ‘care packages’ with journaling supplies (i.e., journal, disposable camera, markers, glue) were delivered to youth’s homes along with a description of the project and an informed consent form.

[§] A total of 11 volunteers participated in FGDs, including three volunteers who participated in two FGD that took place 10 months apart.

The journals prompted youth to describe themselves, their favourite moments at Say Ça!, moments when things did not go as planned, and what they looked forward to with Say Ça!. Youth participated in an online one-hour photography workshop with the aim to introduce the project and familiarize the participants with the disposable cameras and journals. During the following two months, the first author communicated with them for clarifications as they worked through the journal entries. The youth were then invited to a follow-up (online or phone) interview to document their journaling experience and to assist the interpretation of the visual data (Bagnoli, 2004). Photovoice is a useful method for young people to process, document, and share difficult topics (Suárez et al., 2020). Moreover, these methods addressed certain challenges of conducting research with newcomer youth, such as language and communication barriers, difficulties building relationships, and negotiating negative perceptions towards research (Francis Cain & Trussell, 2019), by offering various forms of expression, dedicating time for interaction between researcher and participants, and offering an opportunity to ‘freely and playfully’ express themselves (Georgis & Matthews, 2021).

Three two-hour bilingual (English and French) focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted with Say Ça! volunteers. FGD are an appropriate method to elicit various perspectives about a service in order to guide program development (Krueger & Casey, 2014). One FGD took place in person (n=5) and the other two over Zoom (n=4, 5) to respect physical distancing measures. The first author facilitated the FGD and a trained bilingual graduate student took detailed notes. The first two FGD mapped out the history of the organization and documented perceived effects of participating in the program on the youth. Ten months later, the third FGD explored the effects of the pandemic on the youth’s experiences participating in the program and the organization’s ability to deliver it.

Participant observation by the first author took place during organizational meetings and informal conversations with volunteers and was documented chronologically and systematically as researcher's fieldnotes. Combined with other qualitative methods, participant observation can enhance rapport with participants, improve access to informants and activities, and facilitate a deeper understanding of the phenomena and context being studied, thus improving the quality and interpretation of the data (Musante & DeWalt, 2010) and highlighting the positionality of the researcher and her relationship with the participants (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011).

Analysis

Individual and group interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, denominalized, and coded thematically by the first author using NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018).

Detailed notes taken during the FGD were also coded thematically. Codes were derived from the text to provide a rich description of the participants' lived experiences. Following an initial read-through of the transcripts, fieldnotes and journals, a preliminary codebook was derived. Codes were grouped into categories and a short description was written for each and discussed among researchers. The final codebook was applied to all data sources. Careful attention was placed on features of children's voice (e.g. contradictions, ambiguity, silence) for a more nuanced analysis (Spyrou, 2016). Codes were contrasted across data sources to identify key elements and processes of the online program that contributed to the wellbeing and resettlement of newcomer youth during the pandemic. Participants chose their own pseudonyms (Allen & Wiles, 2016), and those are used in this manuscript.

Researcher positionality

The first author's experiences of being a Latin-American white-passing woman in graduate school, who migrated to Canada and learned English and French as a youth, actively informed

the research design and analysis of data. Meanwhile, the relationships between the researcher and participants, both newcomer youth and volunteers, were constructed and mediated by these social identities and the ensuing power dynamics at play. Self-reflexivity was central during data collection, analysis and writing to understand the effects of the researcher's own viewpoint on the research process (Musante & DeWalt, 2010).

Ethical considerations

An ethics approach that prioritized relationship-building, ongoing and valid consent (Ruiz-Casares & Oates, 2018), transparency, collaboration, reflexivity and safety, was adopted when working with youth and volunteers at all stages of the study (Graham et al., 2015; Meloni et al., 2015). Photo journals were scanned and returned to the youth, emphasizing that they owned their work (Schelbe et al., 2015). Furthermore, the youth chose which photos the researchers could see. All participants were compensated for their time with a gift card. The study integrated needs and interests of the organization (e.g., interview guidelines and research outputs). Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the McGill Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences.

Results

This section describes the youth and volunteers experiences participating in Says Ça! during the pandemic. Strengthening social support through one-on-one relationships and offering a youth-centered program that met youth where they were emerged as key strategies for youth engagement throughout online service delivery.

Strengthening social support through online relationships

Considered “a circle of support”, participants described Say Ça! as a space where newcomer youth could build relationships and socialize. Youth and tutors established meaningful one-on-

one relationships based on reciprocal care. Tutors became sources of information and emotional support for youth and, in some cases, for their families. This relationship-centered approach was key to delivering an online program that supported newcomer youth during the pandemic.

During interviews, youth were eager to share their stories about Say Ça!. Their words to describe their tutors came from a place of mutual care, admiration, and gratitude. “The hands forming the heart shows how kind the tutors are at Say Ça!,” shared Tina in reference to one of her journal entries (Figure 1). Youth felt “seen” by their tutors, who in turn showed respect and patience towards youth. Aware that Say Ça! was a volunteer-run organization, youth knew that their tutors’ motivation to volunteer emerged from wanting to spend time with them, which made a significant difference to their relationship-building and learning.



Figure 1. Youth appreciated the kindness and rapport with their tutors during online sessions.

One key element to developing meaningful relationships online was one-on-one engagement between the youth and their tutor. Each duo was paired by the organization according to common interests and language capacities: “This also helps to create a stronger relationship between the tutor and the youth,” observed Liza, a volunteer. Their weekly meetings promoted a sense of continuity in the relationship and in the work progress. During virtual

tutoring sessions, the pair would dedicate time to get to know each other which made the youth feel more at ease. Youth saw tutors as older youth they could reach out to for advice about social life, school, physical distancing measures, and living in Montreal; they were trusted sources of information for the youth. Equally important, tutors served as sources of emotional support for the youth.

When they are like, ‘You are my second family thank you so much!’ (...) Because it's not so much the language that they are getting out of it but the community and support. (...) Like when they reach out to you for [social] advice. (...) These are the people he goes to instead of peers or parents. (Laura, volunteer)

Say Ça! was also an invaluable source of information and emotional support for the youth's families during the pandemic. At times, volunteers assumed an informal advocacy role to ensure that families had access to the services they needed, such as access to school and employment opportunities. At the time of the project, the organization was developing a resource guide of services for newcomer youth and families in Montreal. Families would also often join the online cultural activities with the youth and show appreciation for the organization's support during the pandemic.

One of the main challenges that emerged from delivering the service online was developing relationships across youth-tutor pairs during group activities. This limited the sense of community within the organization as a whole and was considered “something we lost with the pandemic” by volunteers. During the online group workshops, youth generally listened to the facilitator with limited interaction among them; youth often preferred to keep their cameras off and did not participate much in discussions. From the youth's perspectives, entering a new space

and meeting new peers online was challenging, especially if some members had preestablished relationships. As one youth shared,

At first I thought it wasn't fair that everyone knew each other but then I realized there is nothing I can do so I'd rather enjoy myself than complain (...) [Now] I'm used to it. And it's fun! (DJ Sushi, 12 years)

Youth also commented on not really knowing the other youth or tutors because they did not talk to them much. Casual encounters between youth and tutors that would take place before and after in-person sessions were lost during online sessions. As Oumar, a youth, explained, "with COVID and everything, online, when the course finishes everyone ends their call and it's like there was nothing there, and that's it." Youth suggested that this would be different had they been in person but felt it was fine the way it was during online sessions. Volunteers also shared that encouraging group cohesion was challenging during online sessions since "it's hard to make that connection with people you've never met" (Inés). Lucía, a volunteer, described,

I don't want to force them [youth] to turn on their camera, because it's not right to force them either. But it makes it very difficult, because you don't know to what extent they were listening or not, and I find that part more difficult because you can't know if they are engaged in the activity. (...) We can never finally have a large group discussion because they never speak in large groups and we are always obliged to go back to small groups. So, in the end, we can't create a community in a big group either.

Even with these challenges, participants acknowledged that Say Ça! offered a space for newcomer youth to create meaningful relationships with their tutors and feel a sense of belonging and support within a group. A volunteer described the situation of many newcomer

youth at Say Ça! who, due to their recent arrival and school closures, found themselves in very isolated situations:

Some of our youth needed to create a community. (...) I had one of these youth who wrote to me a lot (...) She felt all alone because she didn't have any friends yet, she hadn't had time at school to make that many friends. She wrote to me 'I wish every day was Saturday.' (...) The beginning of the pandemic for her was still difficult. And I think we had several youth like that. (Inés)

The weekly interactions were meaningful to both the youth and volunteers. From the perspective of the volunteers, these important relationships contributed to the youth's process of opening up and becoming more comfortable in Montreal. As Alanis observed, "There must be something we're doing well because [the youth] are staying. And volunteers are staying. So somewhere there's gotta be a community feeling."

Learning online: A youth-centered program

One of the main themes that emerged was the flexibility and openness with which Say Ça! approached the online learning activities. Participants commented on several youth-centered strategies that facilitated engagement in the online program during the pandemic. For example, youth were more actively engaged in learning when their interests were incorporated into the program, they felt safe to express themselves in culturally inclusive ways, they received individualized academic support, and their needs for fun and leisure were met. These strategies responded to certain challenges of online youth engagement and motivated youth to continue learning during the pandemic. With a youth-focused approach to programming, Say Ça! was able to enhance the program by "placing the youth at the center" and "parting from their interests."

Meeting the youth where they are at

The youth recognized and appreciated the youth-centered and flexible approach to learning.

Through words, drawings, and photos in their journals, youth documented their favourite cultural activities at Say Ça!, which often reflected their personal interests. For example, as shown by the images in Figure 2, Tina shared her passion for drawing during online sessions (2a); Alejandra presented herself as a gamer and enjoyed the opportunity to play Minecraft with her Say Ça! peers (2b); DJ Sushi appreciated the crafts with Say Ça! because she liked doing things with her hands (2c); and P20 shared that the origami activity reminded him of how much he enjoyed this activity before moving to Canada (2d).

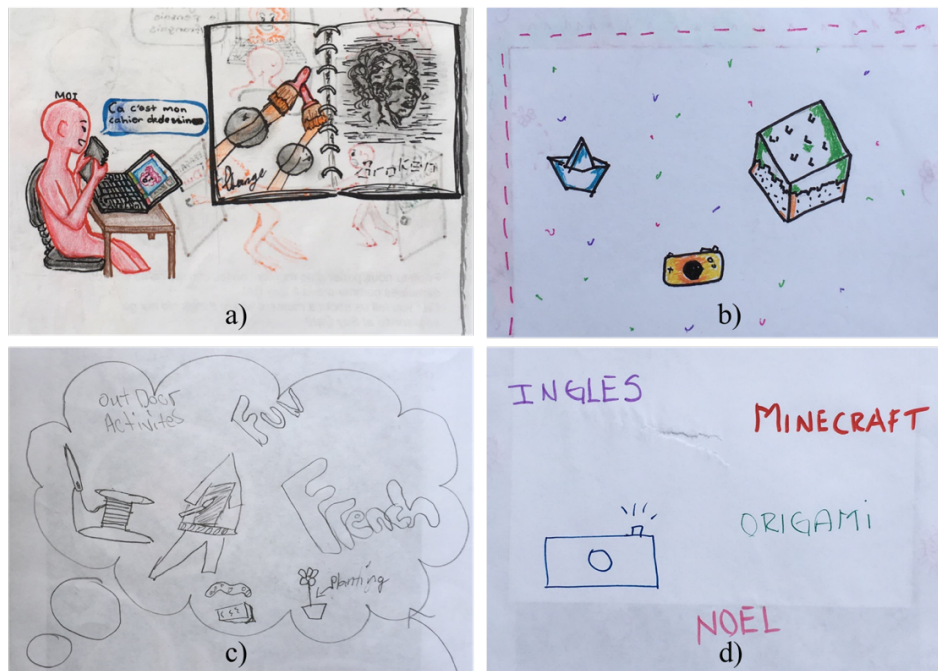


Figure 2. Youth felt more engaged when their interests were incorporated into the program. For example, a) drawing, b) playing Minecraft, c) crafts and d) origami.

Tina's gratefulness for Say Ça!'s weekly activities was echoed by other youth too.

During the pandemic, it was kind of boring and I just needed some activities to do. The activities Say Ça! gave me just like it really kept me busy during the pandemic (...) Even though I like drawing sometimes I need like inspiration and talking to other people and just doing different things gives me inspiration. (Tina)

Youth expressed excitement and gratitude when receiving ‘care packages’ from the organization, adding that the materials helped them participate in the online workshops. Inés added that "I think they liked it a lot, receiving little packages, which allowed them to take part in our activities but also it showed that we are interested in them."

Check-ins at the beginning of each session allowed youth to share their current preferences and challenges. Tutors were often flexible in tailoring tutoring sessions that met their needs:

We go at their pace. (...) We try our best to keep them on track but we're very flexible as well, cause we know that they're just there because maybe they want to hang out with us and spend time with us and that's totally fine. And then cause we know that next week they're still going to show up and hopefully they're going to be in that mood to actually learn, right? (Tom)

By spending time getting to know the youth and their interests, volunteers were able to iteratively incorporate these into the tutoring sessions and the group workshops. One volunteer used an example of a student who became more engaged when the theme of soccer, a hobby of hers, was used to learn French.

During the pandemic, youth were invited to assume different roles in the program and were encouraged to take a more active role within the Say Ça! community. This was key to youth feeling engaged during this period. Youth shared examples of when they took leadership roles

during the online cultural activities by assisting the facilitators and supporting their fellow peers when instructions were not clear. For example, DJ Sushi excitedly shared that she would take on the role of an assistant during an upcoming sewing workshop, concluding that it felt good to be listened to when her ideas were considered in shaping the program. Two volunteers further illustrated the need to offer opportunities for youth to actively participate and co-animate online sessions:

Inés: My idea is to try to include them more, at all levels. We had a workshop where one of our young people was a co-facilitator, and we have another one coming up in March, and this is something that I think is very interesting and important to continue (...)

Lucía: I would say, maybe, to try to keep them active, not just "I present and the student answers my questions." (...) To engage them actively and to trust them.

While many of the activities took their already existing interests into consideration, youth also had the opportunity to discover new activities they may not have had the opportunity to participate in. For example, youth enjoyed learning new skills such as planting seeds (Figure 3) and creating macrame plant hangers.



Figure 3. Youth had the opportunity to learn new things (e.g., planting seeds) during Say Ça!'s group online workshops.

Learning to express oneself

Youth participated in activities from a variety of cultures present in the Say Ça! community. The organization encouraged youth and volunteers to get to know each other while learning to express themselves. Alejandra shared, "I feel creative at Say Ça!; as if I am the doll and all the colours are my imagination." (Figure 4). When asked to describe how she perceives herself at Say Ça!, DJ Sushi wrote, "I feel free" in her journal.



Figure 4. Youth experienced Say Ça! as a space where they felt free to express themselves.

Similarly, Alanis observed that "[youth] were not afraid of showing who they are despite not being in the country where they come from. I think they felt comfortable enough to be able to showcase their traditions." Volunteers perceived Say Ça! as a space where youth could learn to express themselves more openly in comparison to other learning environments:

I think that what we offer that they mostly don't have in school is that they have a place where they can express themselves (...) no matter the way they're going to do it.

Sometimes they're shy, some sometimes they don't feel confident enough to speak in French or in English because it's not their first language and so the goal was for them to be comfortable enough to participate no matter what they're gonna offer to us. (Liza)

As Say Ça! considers itself as a “face of welcome in Canada” to many immigrant families, these examples aligned with one of the organization’s core principle that centers cultural diversity in its volunteers and its program. For both newcomer youth and volunteers, this is what “makes [Say Ça!] feel like home.”

A source of academic support

Schools transitioning to online course delivery reduced youth’s access to learning support services during the pandemic. Through their journals and interviews, participants expressed how Say Ça! had become an important source of academic support. For example, when describing how Say Ça! has changed her life in Montreal, Tina mentioned that it has helped her communicate with peers and learn faster in school, an idea she documented in her journal (Figure 5). Similarly, DJ Sushi shared that she could ask her tutor questions about math, vocabulary, and school generally.

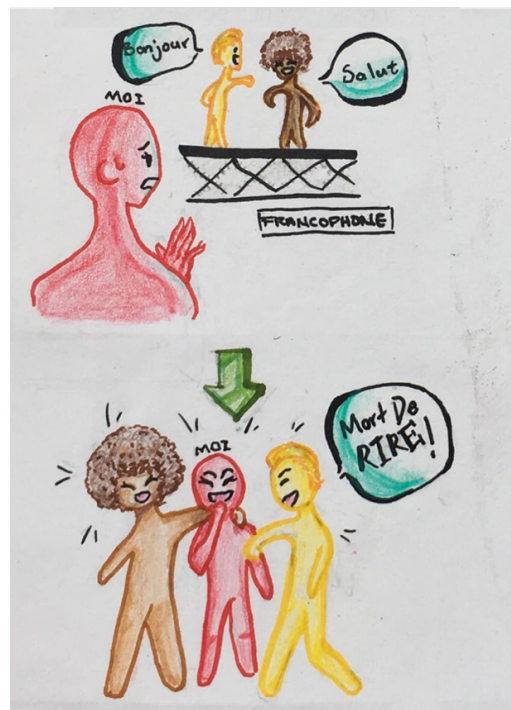


Figure 5. Youth described how Say Ça! contributed to their experiences in the city.

Similarly, volunteers agreed that “We are helping them to adapt to their situation as it is from a day-to-day basis. We are not building their hopes for the future. We are just being there to help them where they are now” (Pino). In their view, this gave youth a sense of structure and cohesion during the pandemic.

I think for them it is important that we exist too. (...) We’re like the only time they can do an activity. Also, the fact that we're a regular thing, that it's every Saturday morning, I think that also helped a bit. Setting a little routine for the youth who didn't really have any points of reference because the whole school was stopped. So, I think that we perhaps met a need, a temporary one, but a need. (Inés)

However, different youth experienced the shift to online Say Ça! differently. For instance, one youth felt less committed to the program since they did not enjoy connecting online and had trouble learning virtually. Another youth shared that they did not like online activities because they had a hard time understanding them and connecting with their tutor. This made them want to participate less at Say Ça! during the pandemic. Other youth prioritized school homework or summer sports and did not have time to participate in Say Ça! activities.

Although newcomer youth missed seeing their peers in-person, in some ways they found online program to be more accessible. For example, youth living in the Greater Montreal Area no longer had a long commute to the downtown building where Say Ça! activities were previously hosted. “We have a better participation and above all a greater turnout with many less no-shows on Saturday mornings,” commented a volunteer. When a youth or volunteer could not make it to Saturday meetings, it was common practice to reschedule for another time of the week. During online sessions, Say Ça! was able to welcome more youth in the program as physical space limited the number of youth who could participate. While the online program has become more

accessible to some youth, it has also confronted the organization with some of the youth's realities of not having stable internet connection or computers to participate. In response, Say Ça! delivered laptops to youth who did not have access to them.

The role of play and leisure

Youth shared that their sessions with Say Ça! provided them with a fun way to learn the language and settle into the new city and culture. For example, Alejandra explained that “I really liked it when they mixed studying and games.” Similarly, DJ Sushi shared that “my favourite moments at Say Ça! are learning French, fun activities, when we all tried something new, when we all laughed, talking and fun! (...) We all laughed. Yes, when one of us makes a mistake and then we try to correct or when we make funny faces.” DJ Sushi also included the word fun in several of her journal entries and drew a trophy for Say Ça! to show that the organization has made her life better in Montreal because they have made French fun to learn (Figure 6). Participants shared that play had an important role in getting to know each other and developing a relationship virtually from their homes.



Figure 6. A youth honored Say Ça! a trophy for making learning French fun for her.

Volunteers recognized how the program responded to the youth's need for leisure, especially with cancelled school and extracurricular activities. A tutor shared her observations about the how Say Ça! responded to these needs, with the agreement from other volunteers in the group discussion:

For the youth, I'm quite convinced that [Say Ça!] remains as one of their rare sources of fun, of community, of group, even though it's far from perfect, but I think they like it. (...) There's also the fact that in high schools, all the social activities have been cancelled this year, so it's certain that young people need to get involved in something. There's no sports team, no theatre team, nothing at the high school, so for sure [Say Ça!] also meets this need for community. (Lucía)

Discussion

This study followed a group of newcomer youth and volunteers to document their experiences of participating in Say Ça!, a welcome program in Montreal, during the pandemic. Through photo journals and individual interviews with youth and FGD with volunteers, this study highlights a few elements of online learning program delivery that were essential to the youth's engagement and participation. Most notably, adopting a *relationship-centered approach* that strengthened one-on-one tutor-youth relationships, as well as a *youth-centered approach* that parted from the youth's interests, and offered a space of self-expression, academic support, and leisure. Both of these approaches, discussed in detail in the following section, allowed for a crucial flexibility in program delivery to respond to the evolving needs of youth and the frequently changing public health measures during the pandemic.

A key aspect of a *relationship-centered approach* was promoting one-on-one meaningful relationships. These were beneficial for newcomer youth for a variety of reasons including to

socialize and find emotional support, to make virtual learning more engaging, and to provide useful information to youth and their families—all elements that contribute to a *Pedagogy of Community* (Jaffee, 2016). Beyond their language tutoring roles, volunteers were an invaluable resource for the youth as they navigated a new society compounded by a global pandemic. In agreement with previous studies, our findings emphasize the importance of centering care and empathy in learning environments with newcomer youth (Dorion et al., 2019). As such, educators may develop a deep understanding of student's complex backgrounds and experiences in order to advocate for their corresponding academic, social, and material needs (Bajaj & Suresh, 2018; Kelly et al., 2021). In this way, programs may also address the tendency to homogenize newcomer youth and avoid delivering services that do not meet their individual needs (Flett, 2021). Advancing a theory of *critical care* in community-based educational settings, Antrop-GonzálezDe Jesús (2006) advocate for a balance of meaningful mentorship relationships, recognition of the students' own experiences and capacity, and high academic success, when working with diverse communities of youth. In promoting close relationships between volunteers and youth, community-based organizations may also connect youth to various resources and offer flexible programming (Pavlakis, 2021). In line with studies that suggest one-on-one mentorship relationships can contribute to newcomer youth's social capital (Thomas et al., 2016), our study showed that through Say Ça!, newcomer youth formed meaningful relationships with their tutors, gained knowledge of local norms and were linked to public resources and services. Mentoring relationships in community-based programs for newcomer youth have facilitated sharing of information and emotional support, and introducing the youth to their new communities (Thomas et al., 2016). Importantly, healthy mentoring within community-based initiatives has been shown to be a strong predictor of emotional wellbeing for

newcomer youth (Sánchez-Aragón et al., 2020). According to the Canadian Council for Refugees Youth Network (2020), supporting youth through one-on-one connections and pairing them with other youth to build their social network are promising practices that respond to newcomer youth's challenges of mental health and social isolation. Future studies could further explore these peer-to-peer relations and their impact on youth wellbeing outcomes. Whereas many studies have been conducted on schools supporting newcomer youth (Dorion et al., 2019; Kassan et al., 2019) as well as online schooling during the pandemic (Poletti, 2020; Popyk, 2021; Primdahl et al., 2020; Selimos & Daniel, 2017), our study contributes to the limited research on online community-based educational settings with this population.

Mitigating exposure to information that is inaccurate or taken out of context is already a challenge for newcomers and has been amplified by the pandemic (Brickhill-Atkinson & Hauck, 2020). Services that are well informed of resources available to newcomer families and are able to provide accurate and accessible information are essential, and even more so during a health crisis (Brickhill-Atkinson & Hauck, 2020). Similar to our findings, previous studies describe the benefits of connecting newcomer families to other resources available, arguing for culturally sensitive forms of communication (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). During the pandemic, online services for newcomer youth have become an essential source of information, especially in a context of frequently changing public health measures (Endale et al., 2020). Similar to Say Ça!'s online service delivery, previous studies with refugee youth have shown that technology can facilitate the building of social networks and foster a sense of belonging (Veronis et al., 2018) and that community-based organizations working with newcomer youth who engage family members in online sessions may have the potential to facilitate a bond between the organization and the family more broadly.

Following a *youth-centered approach*, our findings suggest that key aspect of feeling engaged in the online program for youth was seeing their interests reflected and capacities recognized in the group activities (Kucirkova & Littleton, 2017), as well as having the material resources to participate in them. A lack of access to technology and internet has been widely documented during the pandemic, including the more profound problem of widening the inequity gap (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020). Improving access to the program was especially important in the context where many of their usual activities had been limited in response to physical distancing measures. Anchoring a program in the users experience is a practice commonly found in both learning environments and mental health interventions. Moreover, it is in line with the Convention of the Rights of the Child that advocates for a child-centered approach and recognizes children as agents of change in their lives and environments (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). In a review about resilience of children with refugee status, Pieloch et al. (2016) found that fostering a sense of belonging and community support in education and mental health interventions was essential to promoting resilience of this population. Similarly, SampsonGifford (2010) describe the wellbeing and resettlement benefits of *therapeutic landscapes* as places for restoring relationships (e.g., socialization) and opportunity (e.g., education and games) for newcomer youth.

A common challenge for newcomer youth is their integration into school, communication with peers and academic success (Khanlou et al., 2014). The academic support that Say Ça! provided during the pandemic was especially important in the context where schools transitioned online, limiting the support that youth received (Brickhill-Atkinson & Hauck, 2020). Continuing to offer this support was essential during the pandemic, as language proficiency has been shown to benefit newcomer youth's psychological and socio-cultural adaptation (Buchanan et al., 2018).

Similarly, continuing to build support networks and social places, which were both limited during the pandemic, have also been identified as important in the context of resettlement (Campbell et al., 2016), making services like Say Ça! key in this context.

Say Ça! provided newcomer youth with a space for self-expression that was inclusive and this was prioritized over language learning. Informal youth-led learning environments can provide a safe space to ethnoculturally diverse youth can learn to express their emotions and understand those of their peers (Clonan-Roy et al., 2020). In discussing the healthy acculturation and adaptation of newcomer youth, Berry et al. (2006) argue for policies and programs that encourage youth to retain a sense of their own cultural identity while establishing connections with the new society. Future studies should explore how promoting diverse cultural identities in online services could benefit newcomer youth. Offering spaces for leisure and self-expression have been beneficial for newcomer youth in their process of resettlement and community-building (Stodolska & Camarillo, 2018). The importance of balancing structure to facilitate learning and fun to motivate and engage the students has already been highlighted in previous studies (Aliyyah et al., 2020). By offering youth some structure in their weekly routine, Say Ça! may also contribute to the prevention of negative psychological symptoms (Benecke et al., 2020). This would be a worthwhile area for future study among youth attending Say Ça! activities and other similar programs for newcomer migrants and refugees.

We acknowledge several limitations of this study. The small sample size makes it difficult to generalize to the larger population of newcomer youth or to other contexts. Newcomer youth participants demonstrated a high command of English or French as well as a high comfort level with technology and online interfaces, suggesting a possible bias in the self-selected sample. Future studies could explore newcomer youth's experiences who are not fluent

in the host society's languages. Further diversifying participants in group discussions too may avoid the possible over homogenization of perspectives that were captured in our study. Additionally, future studies should consider the dynamic nature of identity in the process of adaptation and incorporate nuanced self-definitions of the term newcomer youth (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016). Future studies would benefit from exploring reasons why participants chose not to participate in the study, particularly when recruiting within an organization. While online interventions are increasingly becoming a common support for young people's learning, socialization, and play, these tools may also increase their exposure to risk of harm in online spaces (UNICEF, 2020) and create inequities by widening the gap with youth who do not have access to appropriate technology (Walters, 2020). Researchers should explore the strategies used by service providers to both mitigate these risks and promote a positive virtual learning experience for all youth.

A key take away from youth's experiences participating in Say Ça! is that rather than comparing services to the way they were delivered before the pandemic, the focus should be on services that *can* be delivered during the pandemic, considering the limitations and obstacles that emerge in this context, and the conditions that facilitate adaptation and innovation under these circumstances. More generally, this study outlines some of the ways in which "listening to as well as centering, exchanging, and honoring stories by and about young people" (Kinloch et al., 2020, p. 76) can have meaningful influence in the development of programs that best respond to their needs. Centering youth and their experiences in research is a way of demonstrating resistance to the inequalities the same research is attempting to investigate (Fox, 2019). Recognizing that a response to children's wellbeing requires coordination and collaboration across sectors, community-based organizations are well positioned to design and implement

services as they are often in closer touch with the realities and needs of the families they serve (Symons & Ponzio, 2019). Identifying and working alongside already existing community engagement strategies and structures are essential to delivering contextually specific and appropriate services (Gilmore et al., 2020). Moreover, the perspectives of newcomer youth are crucial to inform program development and delivery and to shape public discourse and public policies, including during a health crisis (Liegghio & Caragata, 2020).

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Discussion

This thesis centers on the experiences of newcomer youth as both a practical and ethical approach to understanding their realities. In recognizing the right and capacity of newcomer youth to participate in and contribute meaningfully to decisions that affect their lives, their perspectives generate new knowledge that contributes, on one hand, to a practical approach to advancing more equitable services in the new society, and on the other, to an ethical approach that recognizes newcomer youth as valuable contributors in knowledge production, not merely as research subjects.

Findings from Article 1 illustrate some of the contextual factors that influence how child agency is understood and exercised within immigrant households. From the perspectives of immigrant children and caregivers, we described ways in which agency is negotiated within the family and in the new society, as well as how it is influenced by the nature of the parent-child relationship, the material and social resources available to the family, and the perceived and lived experiences of authority and safety in the new society. We learned that to understand child agency in this context, we must view it as both a relational and situated concept. On one hand, this means repositioning agency not as a property of the individual but as grounded in their relationships (McLaughlin, 2020) and on the other, recognizing that agency is embedded within social, cultural, economic, and material contexts generated by geographical and social boundaries (Choi et al., 2019). Moreover, we argue that society's perceptions of children as dependent may contribute to their vulnerability and thus, strengthening child agency can contribute to combatting child abuse and neglect (Lansdown, 2020) and enhancing children's subjective wellbeing (González et al., 2015). More generally, to improve culturally-sensitive services in the new society, decision makers and service providers should consider the

perspectives of immigrant children and caregivers on the factors that influence childcare practices in their families as well as on reconceptualization's of neglect.

In Article 2 we explored the experiences of newcomer youth and volunteers participating in Say Ça!, a community-based welcome program in Montreal, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on the perspectives of service users and program facilitators, we outline a few key elements of online learning program delivery that were essential to the youths' engagement and participation. For example, adopting a relationship-centered approach that strengthened one-on-one tutor-youth relationships (Thomas et al., 2016), as well as a youth-centered approach that parted from the youth's interests (Kucirkova & Littleton, 2017), and offered a space of self-expression (Clonan-Roy et al., 2020) and a source of academic support and leisure (Stodolska & Camarillo, 2018). Both of these approaches allowed for a flexibility in program delivery that was crucial to effectively respond to the evolving needs of youth and the frequently changing public health measures during the pandemic. More generally, we argue that local and community-based organizations are well positioned to develop relevant services and strategies that respond to the changing needs of their target population in the context of a crisis.

Read together, we find connections and reciprocity between the article's individual findings, which further enrich our understanding of youth agency and newcomer youth's realities in the new society. In recognizing youth as social actors and their agency as a relational and situated capacity, welcome services like Say Ça! may take into account the individual, relational, social, cultural, economic and material contexts in which youth find themselves. These contextual factors may serve to better inform and improve the services they provide to this population. Additionally, case examples like Say Ça! further contribute to the concept of youth agency by including the perspectives of ethnoculturally diverse youth and by reinforcing the

importance of relationships, flexibility and centering youth as social agents in programs, research and policy. Together, the findings from both articles point to the importance of recognizing newcomer youth's experiences and the need for these to be considered when developing support systems in the new society that best respond to their needs.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to center, listen to, and honor the stories by and about young people (Kinloch et al., 2020) as a practical and ethical approach to conducting research and developing support systems that best meet their needs. In both articles, immigrant youth and accompanying adults reminded us of the importance of relationships and context, and how these influence both their decisions as well as organizational and institutional decisions made about matters that affect them. We sought the perspectives of caregiving (e.g., parents) and accompanying (e.g., program facilitators) adults as a complement to those of the youth to develop a more nuanced understanding of youth's realities (Blom et al., 2013). We argue that, on one hand, including newcomer youth's views in research is an ethical decision because it questions and addresses 'epistemic injustices' (Fricker, 2007) that situate knowledge on some groups while excluding others (Glass & Newman, 2015), such as young people, immigrants, and the intersection of both (and other) identities. On the other hand, both articles call for the perspectives of immigrant youth to inform program development and delivery and to shape public discourse and public policies in order to improve access to services for this population (Liegghio & Caragata, 2020; Meloni et al., 2015). Ultimately, we argue that centering newcomer youth's experiences in research and practice is both a practical and an ethical approach to generating knowledge and developing equitable services in the new society.

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