Pieces for peace
By Michelle Lam, M.A., Ph.D. (c)

Why this research is important
The Canadian government holds a two-way street model of integration as an ideal, where both newcomers and Canadians adapt for and benefit from one another. However, the vast majority of settlement and integration education seeks to educate newcomers about Canada, with a paucity of resources dedicated to educating Canadians about the experiences of newcomers. In an environment of increasing populism and xenophobia, research-based resources that can educate and prompt empathy, imagination, and understanding for the experiences of others are needed. This research focuses on the outcomes of a tool developed to meet this need, the Refugee Journeys Board Game.

What you need to know
Although integration is described as a 2-way street process, where both newcomers and Canadians change and accommodate, few tools exist to help non-newcomer Canadians learn about integration. The Refugee Journeys Board Game is a way to meet this demand and to provide a launchpad for discussions around topics such as identity, intersectionality, integration, race, culture, values, and more. Participants involved in this board game project report an increase in empathy for newcomer groups arriving in Canada and knowledge about policies, procedures, and the experiences of others.

How the research was conducted
To play the Refugee Journeys Board Game, players progress from “Start” to “Finish” around a circular path. They play with an identity card, which details different aspects of their identity, such as age, language ability, cultural background, sexuality, health, and others. As they progress through the game, players pick up experience cards that impact their progression in the game. For example, a card may set them back, cause them to lose time, or move them forward. No two people play the game the same way, and different identities will experience the game differently, highlighting systemic issues and inequalities. After each experience card is
played, players engage in a guided discussion about how that experience would impact their identity. Players are invited to share their own experiences with each topic if they wish.

**What the researcher found**

The project involved using the game with three groups of high school students, post-secondary students, educators, and researchers at two different locations in Western Canada. After each game was played, the researcher collected feedback from players through a feedback form. Players reported that the game increased their knowledge about experiences newcomers may go through, and they reported higher levels of empathy. Many identified an appreciation for “putting players in the shoes of refugees.” As one player commented, “As players, you discuss these issues not merely as concepts but as human realities.”

**How this research can be used**

The Refugee Journeys Board Game is available here: https://www.thegamecrafter.com/games/refugee-journeys. It can be used to educate community members, students, educators, administrators, or service providers about the integration experiences of newcomers to Canada. Playing a board game can provide people with a space to talk about these issues in a non-threatening environment and can build new knowledge and relationships between players.

**About the researcher**

Michelle Lam is the Director of Brandon University’s Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies. She is completing her Ph.D. in Education at the University of Manitoba. Her doctoral research explores newcomer education and integration in rural Manitoba and Alberta. Lamm@brandonu.ca

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**Publications**


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