Using art and storytelling in addressing social exclusion in the city: the Illustrated Journey Youth Project, Vancouver, BC Canada

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Using art and storytelling in addressing social exclusion in the city:

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project, Vancouver, BC Canada

by

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We accept this professional project as conforming to the required standard

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NOTE: All photos taken by Vancouver Foundation, Alejandra Lopez, Josue Menjivar, Elaine Ng and Yumiko Sasakawa
ABSTRACT

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project is about sharing stories, building trust, and learning creative and healing ways to reflect on identity, culture, language, belonging and self. A group of immigrant and refugee youth paired with artists, illustrators and community facilitators shared stories about their homeland, about their journey to Canada and about their ongoing journey and challenges in their new home, through drawing and comics. This project for and by immigrant/refugee youth was hosted by La Boussole francophone community center, the only social service agency for the francophone community in Vancouver, BC. The Illustrated Journey Youth project aimed to address issues of isolation, language differences, trauma and discrimination through art and storytelling. The youth participants of the project met once a week with the artists/facilitators for four months and learned how to create a comic book with a personal story. By the end of the project the stories were printed in a comic book and shared at a community exhibition that potentially raised awareness about what assets immigrant and refugee youth bring and the challenges they face. I played multiple roles in this project coordinating, implementing and evaluating with a participatory and community based approach. As a Mexican feminist woman and a newcomer to Vancouver, I hope that with projects like this one, we give voice and honor the stories of newcomer youth by learning from them. By documenting the project through the comic books and the process in this report I seek to inspire more spaces for unity within diversity and potentially influence programs and policies that would enhance inclusive communication across differences. In this report I reflect on how art and storytelling catalyze understanding of evolving identities, where our past and our present can be reconciled to reach endless possibilities in the future. I look at how using art in community development projects can strengthen self esteem and positive self awareness to open dialogue (s) and reinvent ourselves with others and through others.

“The truth about stories is that, that’s all we are”

The truth about stories. A Native Narrative. Thomas King 2003
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CHAPTER 1.
INTRODUCTION

Oral stories, written stories, stories that are told through dance, theatre, music, painting, and/or illustrations, build our evolving and dynamic identity and understanding of the world. How we actively listen and tell stories shape our life and give us a sense of belonging.

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project is the story of a personal journey. It is the story of a historical and social journey, a story of the journey of a family, the story of the everyday journey of a village, the story of a colorful market, the story of an exciting day of sharing with friends and family, a journey through our memories, traditions and cultural references. The Illustrated Journey is the story of how we turn our fears and uncertainty into possibilities and hope.

The project responds to La Boussole’s (francophone community centre in Vancouver, BC and host organization of this youth project) current priority of addressing the needs of a growing immigrant and refugee clientele, of which youth are one of the most vulnerable groups.

The great and complex nature of the youth newcomers adjustment needs and the limited ability of the organization to effectively meet these needs all due to capacity constraints, nurtured the idea of looking for funding to start a project and create the space to address immigrant/refugee youth challenges using art and storytelling.

The challenges that immigrant/refugee youth face are far-reaching and multidimensional, and therefore require interventions of greater scope beyond the existing programs of La Boussole. Language difference is a main challenge but youth also face other complex issues such as difficulty adjusting to school or keeping a job, post-trauma, mental health related issues as a consequence of isolation and discrimination, etc. Unfortunately, the services in Vancouver that target specifically the needs of immigrant and refugee youth are limited.
The project strives to create a safe, inclusive, fun and supportive space for these youth to deal with the challenges they face, heal and strengthen their self esteem and voices to grow and participate equally in their schools and community.

Art, storytelling and specifically drawing and comics are used to address the language differences and communicate through images and metaphors.

Furthermore, it is hoped that the youth stories and insights will increase public awareness and support around immigrant and refugee youth issues, and possibly inspire better programs, practices and policies. By using art and storytelling to address challenges of discrimination, isolation, identity and belonging, the project intends to facilitate a space for self reflection, empowerment and inclusion with the youth. Bringing immigrant and refugee youth together with artists/facilitators to collaborate in sharing stories through creating a comic book gives the youth skills of self expression and self reflection as well as long term one-on-one mentoring and support. Through the project the coordinating team connects the youth to relevant social services and community resources and gives them the tools to navigate these resources and services.

Overall, this project is a story of a diverse and creative community of committed youth that want to feel
they belong to their new home in Vancouver, and learn from each other and share their skills, strengths, fears, laughter and heart through storytelling and drawing.

This project speaks to the different realities of the world, to how poverty, war and inequalities compounded with race, gender, color, age, class and religion affect people in different ways.

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project is hosted by La Boussole a non-profit Francophone community center located in Vancouver, BC. The mission of the organization is to support Canadian and immigrant/refugee French speakers who are facing multiple challenges. La Boussole is a community center that offers intake and advice, access to computers, phones and fax machines, support and referrals to other services and resources, community meals, English courses, and social services like interpretation and translation, employment counseling, referrals to medical services, legal support, housing support, settlement support services such as: social isolation, housing issues, need of legal assistance, job search and employment counseling, mental health problems, drug abuse issues, crisis intervention or hunger.

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project has been funded by Vancouver Foundation, CKNW Orphans Fund and the French Federation of BC.

The goals of the Illustrated Journey Youth Project are to create a space where youth participants can discuss and deal with challenges that affect them in relation to their refugee/immigrant experience and by getting involved with other youth and artist participants to foster empowerment and healing.

I got involved in the Illustrated Journey Youth Project through Pilar Riaño professor of the Social Work Faculty at the University of British Columbia and Pascaline Neskera at the time was the employment counselor of La Boussole francophone community centre. I
provide ongoing and participatory monitoring and evaluation and also have coordinated and implemented the projects. I am currently coordinating the third Illustrated Journey Youth Project. As a participant and community organizer I continually aim to find tools to connect my personal theoretical journey as a graduate student and the people and stories of strength and hope within the different migrant and refugee communities. The Illustrated Journey has been a great opportunity to reconnect, participate and learn. As a newcomer to Vancouver myself I was looking for meaningful community involvement. Both bringing a belief in youth and art as an emancipating way of communication, expression and healing. Participating in this project has also been a space to reflect on my role as graduate student and as a social planner or community developer.

Some of the objectives of this project have been to bring different artistic approaches to storytelling. Specifically, to give the youth participants the tool of telling a story through drawing and, to also walk with them through the process of sharing their stories and making their voices heard with diverse and fun techniques. The project provides the youth an opportunity to hear the stories and voices of people from Vancouver that have faced similar challenges of identity and belonging.

Using this paper I will present the Illustrated Journey Youth Project as a community based example of an initiative that addresses diversity, migration/refugee challenges and youth needs through art to enhance social inclusion.

The next chapter provides an overview of the context of migration in Canada and closely examines the immigrant and refugee youth experience in Vancouver. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and community process of the Illustrated Journey project. Chapter 4 explains the findings and outcomes of the project and Chapter 5 provides reflection on the outcomes and process. Chapter 6 draws a number of conclusions from the project experiences and suggests areas for improvement.
CHAPTER 2.

CONTEXT

It is important to look at the migration policies and migration flow at a national, provincial and local level to understand how dynamic and changing the social fabric in Vancouver is. By analyzing the migration phenomena of Canada and specifically of youth in British Columbia we can reflect on their social, political, cultural and economic realities and challenges and potentially come up with strategies to address their needs and provide spaces for community organizing and capacity building.

2.1 Canada migration statistics and policies

Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC), with its annual publication, Facts and Figures: Immigration Overview—Permanent and Temporary Residents, CIC provides a broad range of statistical information on admissions to Canada. Facts and Figures 2008: Immigration Overview—Permanent and Temporary Residents presents the annual intake of permanent residents by category of immigration and of temporary residents by yearly status from 1984 to 2008.

Permanent residents

Since 2002, Canada’s immigration program has been based on the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and its regulations. IRPA replaces the Immigration Act of 1976 and defines three basic categories of permanent residents, which correspond to major program objectives: reuniting families, contributing to economic
development and protecting refugees (family class, economic immigrants and refugees).

On an exceptional basis, IRPA also gives Citizenship and Immigration Canada the authority to grant permanent resident status to individuals and families who would not otherwise qualify in any category—for example, in cases where there are strong humanitarian and compassionate considerations, or for public policy reasons. These discretionary provisions provide the flexibility to approve deserving cases not anticipated in the legislation. The graph below illustrates that over the last twenty-two years, the largest categories of permanent residents to Canada have been family and economic migrants.

![Graph showing Canada - Permanent residents by category, 1984 to 2008](image)

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Temporary residents

Canada’s immigration program also provides for the temporary entry of foreign workers and business people, foreign students and visitors. These temporary residents contribute to Canada’s economic development by filling gaps in the labor market, enhancing trade, and purchasing goods and services.

Refugees

The Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), an independent administrative tribunal, oversees a quasi-judicial process that determines claims for refugee protection made in Canada. The IRB hears refugee protection claims referred by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA). Persons whose claim for protection has been accepted may subsequently apply for permanent residence for themselves and dependants or close family members, whether in Canada or abroad. If the claim for protection is refused, the individual is informed of the reasons and is required to leave the country.

The refugee category of immigrants also includes other foreign nationals allowed to remain in Canada on humanitarian or compassionate grounds under “special considerations.” These other humanitarian cases include a small number of individuals who have never filed a refugee claim but who were processed under special programs established to handle refugee-like cases.
2.2 Immigration overview in Vancouver

According to the 2001 Census, there were 738,600 immigrants living in the Vancouver Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). The immigrant population in Vancouver has increased substantially over the 15 years ending in 2001 and has grown at a considerably faster pace than the Canadian-born population. Over the period of 1986 to 2001, the number of immigrants living in Vancouver increased by 346,700 or 88%. In comparison, Vancouver’s Canadian-born population increased by 229,200 or 24%. Immigrants accounted for 57% of Vancouver’s total population growth between 1986 and 2001.

Vancouver’s immigrant population has grown at a faster pace than the immigrant population in British Columbia and in Canada. To take the most recent five-year period as an example, between 1996 and 2001 the number of immigrants in Vancouver increased by 104,900, or 17%. By comparison, the total number of immigrants living in Canada increased by 477,400 or 10% during the same five years.

In 2001, Vancouver was the place of residence of between 6% and 7% of the population of Canada, up from 5% in 1986.

As well, the city was home to nearly 14% of Canada’s 5.4 million immigrants, compared to 10% fifteen years earlier.

Vancouver’s share of the country’s 24 million Canadian-born persons increased to 5% in 2001 from 4.6% in 1986. In 2001, Vancouver’s share of British Columbia’s population was 51%, up from 48% 15 years earlier, its share of the province’s immigrants was 73% compared to 62% in 1986 and its share of the province’s Canadian-born population, in 1986, was 43%.

Vancouver’s immigrants come from all over the world and represent a diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Asia has always been a major source of immigrants for Vancouver. In 2001, for example, there were 189,700 residents of Vancouver who had landed in Canada between 1996 and 2001.

The most common country of birth for these immigrants was China, accounting for 20% of very recent immigrants (it is 29% if persons born in Hong Kong are included), followed by Taiwan, which supplied 13% of very recent immigrants.

Seven of the ten most common countries of birth were in East Asia, South-east Asia and South and Central Asia: China, Taiwan, India, Hong Kong, Philippines, South Korea and Iran. These countries combined accounted for 70% of very recent immigrants. The large
share of recent and very recent immigrants from this part of the world is unique to Vancouver. Other cities, including Toronto, have greater diversity in the countries of birth of recent immigrants.

Among Vancouver’s earlier immigrants—those landing in Canada before 1986—the United Kingdom and China were the most common countries of birth, accounting for 29% of this group. In general, the birth origins of Vancouver’s immigrant population vary in relation to the period of immigration. Asian birth origins are predominant among those who immigrated in the 1980s and 1990s. As mentioned previously, six of the top ten countries of birth of very recent immigrants are in Asia. For immigrants who landed from 1986 to 1995, eight of the top ten countries of birth are in Asia.

In terms of housing recent immigrants in Vancouver, 23% of recent immigrant households live in crowded conditions—that is, have one person or more per room—compared to 4% of Canadian-born households.

Four in ten recent immigrant households spend more than 30% of their income on shelter, compared to three in ten Canadian-born households.

It is also important to note that four in ten very recent immigrants are in a low-income situation, three times as many as the Canadian-born.

2.3 Immigrant Youth in Vancouver

From 2004 to 2008, approximately 40,000 immigrants arrived annually in B.C. and of these approximately 6,400 were youth. A large proportion of immigrant youth arrived as dependants, accompanying their families.

Other youth came to B.C. as Temporary Residents including International Students,
Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs), and humanitarian cases (including Refugee Claimants).

Between 2004 and 2008, approximately 76,000 temporary residents arrived annually in B.C. and approximately 29,000 were youth. A large proportion of temporary resident youth arrived as International Students.

Whether young people come to Canada as dependants or come to study or to work, they face challenges in integrating into Canadian society. The main challenge that immigrant or refugee youth face is the language differences. Fewer immigrant youth arriving in B.C. have official language ability (English or French) than nationally.

B.C. receives 40,000 new immigrants each year, and approximately one in six are youth, comparable with the national rate. Between 2004 and 2008, B.C. became the new home to 32,116 immigrants aged 15 to 24. That is an average of 6,423 immigrant youth arriving each year. In 2008, 6,871 immigrant youth arrived in B.C., 24.5% more than in 2004.

The migration policies of Canada highlight that immigrants come to Canada in different immigration classes.

During the five years from 2004 to 2008, most youth immigrant arrivals to B.C. were either Economic Class arrivals (48.5%) or Family Class arrivals (42.7%).

Distribution of Immigrant Youth arrivals to B.C. by Immigration Class, (2004 – 2008)

The top three source countries of immigrant youth arrivals to B.C. were Mainland China, India and the Philippines, which accounted for 53.7% (17,246) of the immigrant youth arrivals over the period. This was somewhat higher than for immigrants of all ages from these countries who accounted for 48.4% of arrivals.
From 2004 to 2008, 55.0% (17,678) of immigrant youth had official language ability (English or French), which was lower than the national share (64.8%). B.C. had the second lowest share of immigrant youth with official language ability across the provinces, following Prince Edward Island. Excluding Territories, Nova Scotia (79.6%), New Brunswick (75.0%) and Quebec (77.1%) had higher than the national share of immigrant youth arrivals with official language ability (64.8%).

The official language ability of B.C. immigrant youth is in line with B.C. immigrant arrivals for all ages with 58.2% reporting having official language ability, lower than the national share of 67.0%.

43.8% of immigrant youth arrivals to B.C. had Mandarin and Punjabi as their native languages compared to 20.8% at the national level.

A large proportion of youth immigrants arrived with secondary or less education. Immigrant youth (aged 15 to 19) are in the prime age group for attending secondary school. Within the immigrant youth aged 15 – 19 group, 90.5% had secondary or less educational attainment, slightly higher than the national share at 88.5%. Within the age group (20 - 24), 52.9% of B.C. immigrant youth arrivals had secondary or less education levels, comparable with the national average of 52.3%.

B.C. received a lower proportion of immigrant youth with no formal education than at the national level regardless of age groups 15 to 19 or 20 to 24. Within the age group 15 to 19, 5.3% of immigrant youth had no formal education, lower than the 6.4% nationally. Within the age group 20 to 24, 2.7% had no formal education, lower than 3.3% nationally.
In 2008, there were 126,050 temporary residents in B.C. and 37.5% of them were youth. This was higher than the national share of 29.3%.

In 2008, there were 50,221 International Students in B.C. and 63.1% of them were youth, which was comparable with the national share (65.2%). It was higher than for adults aged 25 to 54 (24.3%) and children up to 14 years (12.5%).

In 2008, there were 58,307 Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in B.C. and 23.0% (13,383) of them were youth. This was higher than the national share of 13.2%.

In 2008, the largest proportion of International Student youth in B.C. were in university (39.1%), followed by secondary or less (24.9%) and other post-secondary education (18.4%).

In 2008, there were 4,951 humanitarian cases in B.C. and 16.2% of them were youth, which was comparable with the national share of 15.3%. Most of them (97.0%) were Refugee Claimants. In 2008, Mexico was the predominant source country for humanitarian youth (19.8%) while China (10.9%) and Honduras (6.6%) were the second and the third source countries for humanitarian youth in B.C.

In Canada and particularly the larger cities like Vancouver there is an ongoing debate about diversity and multiculturalism. The debate is catalyzed by the on going growth of different migrant and refugee communities. There is an increasing demand from these communities to address their needs and accessing jobs, housing and same opportunities as the rest of the citizens. There is a need to define how these different communities will share a common space bringing their culture, assets, stories as well as opening the dialogue for interacting among the existing communities and among them.
During the mid 80’s and the 90’s, almost two thirds of immigrants came from regions such as South Asia and South-east Asia, including China, Philippines, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India, and Korea. The demographic shift in source country has greatly changed the profile of ethnic composition in the city.

In response to these demographic changes, the City has undertaken various initiatives and processes to offer services and programs and try to address the needs of newcomers. The City supports local social and cultural development initiatives through the provision of civic grants to local non-governmental organizations, many of which deliver services to newcomers.

There is also a need to provide services to smaller migrant and refugee communities. In recent years, people from countries in Africa and Latin America, Vietnam and Afghanistan have been migrating to Canada in larger numbers. It seems their growing community presence has been somewhat unrecognized when examining what services are available to meet their needs. These migrant communities are of small proportion in comparison to other larger migrant communities in Vancouver.

Issues of collective voice, representation, and ability to access public process are relevant concerns for these groups.

Currently, there is no direct role for the City to provide input to other levels of...
government concerning immigration policy. It is therefore important that there is a local perspective in the design and delivery of services to newcomers.

Many migrants in Vancouver face the challenges of finding work in a new land, living on low income, raising children in communities identified as high risk for children, and struggling with language differences, isolation and discrimination.

The expectation of the Canadian government is for newcomers to assimilate and contribute to the common good of society. Left to themselves, many immigrants and refugees might fulfill this expectation but programs, services and policies responsive to the needs and aspirations of newcomers will help newcomers navigate the services and resources to access opportunities and build a healthy new home.

According to “The New Canadian Youth and Children Study” by Morton Beiser, Robert Armstrong, Linda Ogilvie, Jacqueline Oxman-Martinez and Joanna Anneke Rummens one in every five children living in Canada was either born somewhere else or born into immigrant and refugee families. The expectation is that their achievements help justify the relatively large immigration rates. Nevertheless, the expectation is for this to happen even though by choosing to ignore their health, development and adaptation.

According to the Ethnic Diversity Survey conducted by Statistics Canada and Canadian Heritage, only one in ten of all Canadian residents 15 years of age and older had personally encountered discrimination. By comparison, one in five members of visible minority groups reported at least one experience with discrimination because of ethnicity, culture, skin color, language, accent or religion. The highest instances of this discrimination – one in three – were reported by Africans and Afro-Caribbean. Visible minority status was not the only basis for discrimination. Recently arrived, non-visible minority group immigrants were twice as likely to have experienced discrimination as longer-stay, or second generation immigrants.

The experiences faced before, during and after migrating affect immigrant and refugees’ well being; adding the struggles of settling and integrating most likely compound this pressure.

Children and youth are in a formative and ongoing process of building self esteem and confidence. By acknowledging and responding to isolation and discrimination, they can turn into their personal assets like
ON JUNE 12, 1964, A VIETNAMESE SOLDIER CARRIED ME WITH ANOTHER FRIEND OF MINE, WHILE WE WERE IN THE FOREST TO HUNT.

TWO DAYS LATER MY CLASSMATE CAME TO WORK AT 12 NOON. HE SAW US AT THE VIETNAMESE ARMY PLACE AND WE YELLED AT HIM.

WE WERE IN THE DETENTION CENTRE WITH HAND CUFFED TOGETHER.
their self esteem and outside onto their families and communities.

Within this context, the La Boussole francophone community center, seeks to provide for immigrant and refugee youth through the programming of the Illustrated Journey Youth Project.

La Boussole offers services, support and counseling to all francophone people whether they are from Quebec or other francophone countries in the world and it addresses the needs of women, men and families. With the Illustrated Journey, La Boussole aims to outreach and address the lack of space for youth to express, meet other people, feel safe, strengthen their self esteem, well being and mostly feel at home.

Accepting and celebrating one’s ethno-cultural identity is a key factor to enhance social cohesion in a diverse context like that reflected in Canada.

The positive connections teenagers have with their background and culture as well as with other youth who face similar experiences are important. It can potentially provide a foundation whereby they are able to relate to others with different ethnic backgrounds inclusively. This can foster a better understanding and connection with other immigrant and refugee groups as well as better performance and sense of belonging in schools.

There are some studies that explain how children who are proud of their ethnic identity and are at the same time negotiating their Canadian identity through dialogue and not through assimilation are the most likely to have a positive sense of self and confidence.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Illustrated Journey Youth Project

The Illustrated Journey Youth Project engages and supports immigrant and refugee youth facing multiple barriers to integration. The project brings together twenty youth with comic book artists in collaborative work. The project allows for these youth to enjoy a team-based, fun art project while exploring and dealing with issues that affect their lives such as the experience of displacement and of integration to a new culture and society. The project responds to La Boussole’s current objective of addressing the needs of a growing immigrant and refugee clientele, of which youth are one of the most vulnerable groups.

The project has three stages.

• In the first stage, the youth attend four hour workshops every Saturday for four months. This takes place from May
through July. The workshops are organized to expand, explore and refine the drawing talents of youth participants and provide opportunities to learn drawing techniques. They learn the importance of art and illustration, specifically comic books as a common language to express and communicate with others to overcome language barriers;

- The second stage runs from July to August where every Saturday the same youth attend further workshops. In these workshops they reflect about their stories associated with life before, during and after their move to Canada. With the help of the organizers, artists and other youth they document and start their comics. The artist mentors are assigned participants and together they finish details and provide guidance for the youth comics.

- In the last stage, the comics are published and there is an exhibition. The participants, artists, volunteers, media and other non profit organizations that give services to migrants are invited to celebrate the completed works at an opening launch.

The way in which the Illustrated Journey Youth project is envisioned aims to have a community oriented and participatory process. The priority is to create a process where the youth can voice their concerns and speak out, while reflecting on their identity and struggle of belonging and questioning their assumptions and the assumptions and stereotypes of their new environment.

**Comic and illustration are the communication tool that is used by everyone to share and build connections.**

Once the media used for the project is decided, the project is supported by a group of comic book artists and illustrators that teach/mentor the youth. This group of artists commit once a week to the four hour Saturday workshop where they share with the youth their drawing skills and teach them what a comic book is. The artists share ways in which the comic book has been used to communicate personal, political, meaningful, joyful or challenging stories.

The use of drawing and metaphors helps address language barriers as well as trauma and isolation.
To be able to facilitate a creative process as well as a healing and empowering process it also requires a group of artists that are not only skilled and talented making comics but that have teaching/mentoring experience and personal or professional experience with immigration issues and/or immigrant/refugee population.

The Illustrated Journey coordinator posts invitations to participate at art schools, volunteer posting sites, via internet and comic jams to find comic book artists and illustrators that were interested in joining the Illustrated Journey Youth Project. The artists’ role is crucial to ensure the objectives of the project. It is important for the artists to respect that the art and comic making is only one component of the project goal. It is the concrete outcome but not the sole purpose of the project. The project coordinator interviews artists with the criteria of finding talented people who show a commitment to social justice, that have aptitude to teach and mentor the youth during every workshop in the basics of drawing, life drawing, comic making and storytelling through illustration.

The artists who have participated in each of the projects have different backgrounds and have the experience of being immigrants themselves or through their parents. There has been an El Salvadorian American male comic book artist, a Japanese Canadian female animator and illustrator, a Chinese Canadian comic book artist, a native visual and comic book artist, a Quebequois illustrator and comic book artist involved in the project. How their own experience informed their mentoring and workshops has been very important to create safety and trust for the youth.
The artists participate in the planning process from the brainstorming and envisioning of the expected objective for the project and also for the design of the content of the workshops.

The project is aimed at immigrant and refugee youth. The project’s coordinators design posters and flyers with the basics of what the project is and outline the selection criteria. To participate the following three requirements apply:

- To be an immigrant and refugee youth
- To be between 13 to 18 years old
- To have been in Canada for three or less years

It is important to acknowledge that as a community based project there are financial and human constraints. The target group is the youth that are facing huge challenges. Those who cannot afford training yet could really take advantage of the program and benefit from the capacity building, training and support provided by the project. Finding these participants has been a priority.

Schools, community centers, neighborhood houses, refugee transition houses, and other non profit organizations that work with youth have been good places and important networks to outreach for youth. The coordinators also visit schools in Vancouver that have high numbers of immigrant and refugee students that are newcomers to the city.

It is very important to note that The Illustrated Journey Youth project has been designed and implemented for and by refugees and migrants. As part of this, the programming and interactions involve shared understanding.

The coordinators have lived experience of migration themselves or through their families. This makes it easier for them and the youth to relate to the challenges and stories shared during the project.

The coordinator works with the members of the planning team who include; a representative of La Boussole as well as staff at La Boussole involved with logistics and administration of the project. Also part of the team is a project coordinator in
charge of the visioning, content and facilitation of the workshops as well as the overall coordination of the team and allocation of the budget. There is also a project assistant, a youth liaison, the artists/mentors, a caterer, a driver to bring the participants that most recently arrived to Vancouver and that lived in neighboring cities, volunteers, special guests for the storytelling exercises and the youth participants interested in taking part of the planning and debriefing meetings.

Being a community based project, the coordinator makes sure that the input of all the coordination team is acknowledged and included in the planning and implementation of the project. The coordinator makes sure that everyone’s contributions are aligned with the visioning, expectations and objectives set in an initial planning meeting whereby there is a comprehensive introduction of the project. The planning team contributes with ideas and personal critical reflection of each workshop, the content and role that each one of them have during the workshops and an account of their interactions with the youth.

The planning team has the responsibility of attending the meetings, reflecting on the development of the project, providing constructive recommendations and helping with the roles and responsibilities before, during and after the workshops.

The planning team must be aware and respectful of the objectives and of the flexibility that the project requires in order to accommodate its content to address the needs of the youth. The team is required to be sensitive
to the individual learning, emotional and social processes of the youth. When conducting themselves it is essential that they highlight and reiterate with participants the importance of the process rather than the outcome(s) and the importance of trust and relationship building.

The workshops are designed and facilitated by reflecting this focus and addressing the objectives as well as highlighting the importance of the process.

An outline and program of each workshop for every week of the project is designed by the artists and informed by the objectives of the project. The outline highlights the concept and relevance of comics as well as drawing techniques like sketching, life drawing skills, and the different elements of comic making. The overall outline is designed to cover the basic elements of visual expression every week within the timeline of the project. The youth reflect on different stories and think about how they might visually convey them. Over time the works that they prepare become ready to publish in a comic book. This outline is used as a tool to keep the project on track but flexible enough to adapt it according to individual and group needs. Having fun is as important as perfecting how to draw and how to prepare comics. The process is one in which the youth are able to reflect about the challenges and concerns that they have experienced and are facing while responding to a new place.

During the workshops and in between drawing there is always time allocated to mingle, play, eat, learn and share other storytelling techniques.

Comic book art has been the media chosen for this project in order to overcome the language barriers of youth.
from many countries speaking a diversity of languages. Illustration and images are ultimately a universal language and no matter how many languages there are during workshops it is possible to connect through the visual cues associated with drawings and illustrations. The planning team also believes in the importance of introducing other types of storytelling techniques in order to give the youth more tools and ideas on how to express themselves in creative ways. The focus is always that creative art can be used as a way of expressing sharing the youth participants stories. This isn’t only reflected through illustrations but also using dance, spoken word, theatre and other artistic expressions. A diversity of approaches has proved successful to strengthen and open opportunities to share stories.

The youth participants spend four hours one day a week learning how to draw and share stories. The youth participants eat some lunch during the workshop. The lunch is prepared by refugee or immigrant women. The menu for the lunch is also decided in a collaborative way with all the youth participants and the planning team and it is meant to be balanced, appealing for youth and culturally diverse.

In every workshop there is a lesson plan that is reviewed before, during and after the session. The lesson plan considers time to have fun activities that allow the youth to talk to each other in a more casual setting. In these fun activities everyone plays Pictionary, dances, sings or shares something without having to use words or without having to speak English necessarily.

One of the most important aspects of the lesson plan is the time for storytelling, not only with drawings, illustrations and comics but with casual interaction and reflection. The process and sharing and telling a story through active listening and reflection aims to support immigrant and refugee youth in three different levels:

- It builds trust among the other youth and among the artists/mentors and planning team,
- It builds capacity through the process of choosing which stories to share and reflecting on them,
- It improves English language skills as well as strengthening self esteem.
These supporting elements are crucial in building a safe space to speak out without feeling intimidated or vulnerable about language skills, where participants can make friends with people that go through similar experiences and face similar challenges, where those involved can share aspects about culture and talk about identity, background and dreams. This has been key in the construction of a diverse and inclusive community.

Projects that create spaces like the Illustrated Journey does are a starting point in order to build bridges among different cultures, ages, races, genders, classes. Understanding the project is as much an understanding of the responsibilities and opportunities that we have in making happen the communities that we dream of.

To encourage the youth to feel comfortable to share stories, there is time during the workshops to invite speakers and guests to share a story of a journey. Their stories relate to their experiences living in a different country or of their journeys coming or growing up in Vancouver. The project tries to bring together people with different cultural backgrounds and perspectives of art, Vancouver, Canada and identity. The guests through their stories and different exercises showcase to the youth other ways of storytelling. This way the stories can be told through acting, dancing or playing music. The youth have the opportunity to tell different stories in small groups and also share it with the entire group. Simultaneously, the artists/mentors help each youth participant individually with the writing of the stories that will make it to their comic book.

The project is meant to have three different stages that are not limited or exclusive to activities and processes between them.

In the first stage, the youth introduce themselves, as do the artists, the volunteers and the planning team. In this stage the artists/mentors give an introduction to life drawing and comics where they assess the skills of the participants. This is then accommodated into the lesson plan and the program to address the specific needs of the youth. Immigrant and refugee youth engagement is not a smooth and quick process; some of the challenges they face in their new home are shown in this first stage of the project and it is important to address these difficulties to make the youth comfortable and engaged from the beginning.

There is a lot of flexibility in determining the youth assets in this first part of the
The participants are unique and their stories are unique so it is important to give a independent voice and space to each one of the participants. The planning team has to address some of the youth barriers like language, family duties, job schedules and transportation in the first month in order to make the process smoother and meaningful for all.

3.2 Participatory planning and community based approach

The overall framework of the project, content of the workshops as well as evaluation is designed to be participatory and flexible to focus on what the youth need to address.

In this case, it is imperative that the community developer becomes more of an advisor or facilitator to allow the development of a genuine relationship between the facilitator and the participants, leaving open the possibility that both will change in the process.

One aspect that plays a critical role in the coordinators engagement in this community project is the degree of awareness about “self” in the process: particularly examining the values or biases that they bring to the community process. As a researcher there is a responsibility to acknowledge how:

- my ideas, ideals and assumptions may weigh in the interactions with members of specific communities.
- I formulate questions, make observations, and make connections.

Paulo Freire’s writings reinforce a deep belief in humanity and people’s role in making change. He states that: “To be a good (educator) means above all to have faith in people; to believe in the possibility that they can create and change things. It is also necessary to love, to be convinced in the fundamental effort of community.... Education is toward the liberation of people, never their “domestication”. This liberation begins to the extent that men (and women) reflect on themselves and their condition in the world – the world in which and with which they find themselves. To the extent that they are more conscientized, they will insert themselves as subjects into their own history” (Freire, 1971, p. 62).
As a community planner, some ideas that helped me, as researcher address these questions are:

• Overall awareness
• Deliberative Practice
• Acknowledging Difference

Awareness: To challenge, consider and question those things that are often dismissed, particularly, feelings I had, emotions, the awareness and comfort of my surroundings and role. Basically to examine 'other ways of knowing', the things that are not always explicit. This is essential in understanding what clouds or opens my perspective of the project and understanding, the importance of listening in an active and different way; recognition of power relations and enabling connections through dialogue and story.

Deliberative Practice: To take an approach exemplified by John Forrester as deliberative practice. Specifically approaching communities through dialogue and negotiations, to achieve social change through discussion and self transformation. With participatory processes, we build networks and we understand ends and means as well as learning about what we want and what we can do. This is also a participatory learning approach.

Acknowledging Difference: Another priority is to accept the challenge of difference and question privilege when people are being
Flying from El Salvador to my new country.

The stewardess noticed my nervousness. She gave me a sketchpad.

I could not speak English but I had discovered a new way to communicate.
ignored and marginalized. We must question how we can challenge ourselves to listen and positively recognize people that have different beliefs and practices. This learning process is enlightening. It can help us understand how in talking about difference, about fears, anxieties and needs we are able to see beyond. One way of developing skills to create shared spaces is to identify differences and talk about them, to know our location and listen with openness and respect.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire writes of the favelas in Brazil. His work generated dialogue that facilitated the transformation of conscientization (or critical consciousness) and praxis (action based on critical reflection) on how to improve lives. To Freire, (1970) the purpose of education is human liberation, which means that people are the subjects of their own learning, not empty vessels filled by the knowledge of experts.

The Illustrated Journey youth project is meant to be for and by youth. My own participation in the project is as part of a community of youth that I listen to, share stories with, learn from and reflect with in a two way exchange that improves my understanding. Using a community based participatory approach has helped create a dialogue of what newcomers face when coming to Vancouver, find commonalities in this and build on our combined strengths more holistically.

This approach demonstrates that youth must not only be involved in efforts to identify their problems but also to engage in a critical conscientization to analyze their problems and take positive action in some way.
In the Illustrated Journey project the approach is to create a space to talk about the similarities despite coming from very different places and to find the common issues and assets that can unite the youth, the artists, the organizers and the society as a whole. This in turn can gives voice, validates and gives access to newcomers. This again, is a demonstration and recognition of youth as active participants in identifying what is important. In this project it is an approach that allows youth to feel part of an integrated process rather than recipients of direction and knowledge.

Freire advocates that as people engage in dialogue with each other about their communities and the larger social context, their own internal representations and how they think and ascribe meaning about their social world changes. Their relationships to each other become strengthened; and ultimately their ability to reflect on their own values and choices is affected.

Community based participatory research, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, and feminist theory share certain methods and goals: analyzing personal lives in relation to the structures (both overt and hidden) that can control people’s lives; celebrating strengths, not just emphasizing victimization; restructuring the power relations within the research process; and working for goals of social justice (Maguire, 2001).

### 3.3 Project process and community collaboration

The planning team of the Illustrated Journey is diverse and have their own experiences of facing the challenges of migrating to a different country themselves or from that of their parents.

The members of the planning team have the experience of exploring issues of identity and
belonging through their art or professional experiences as well as the experience working with immigrant and refugee population.

The youth participants are refugee and immigrant youth between 13 and 18 years old and they have only been in Canada for three years or less. The youth participants are willing to expand, explore and refine their drawing talents and use this to make a comic book. They also share their personal journeys and life experience.

There is a one month recruitment process in which posters and flyers are distributed. For the youth it is not a requirement to speak English or to be fluent in it. The youth that participate are immigrant and refugee youth where they and/or their families are facing economic and social difficulties as well as the challenge of moving to a culturally different place without social networks, employment, housing or support.

The youth participants were from Nepal, Afghanistan, Mexico, Congo, Swaziland, Vietnam, Colombia and Thailand. They are youth that have been in Canada for less than three years and in most have arrived to Canada as refugees. The youth participants face language barriers and as a consequence, isolation.

The youth that we were most interested in benefiting where the ones where they and their families had faced and were facing difficulties adapting to their new environment, faced challenges finding employment, found themselves isolated because of the location of their housing, had difficulties with the language, their schools, the weather, commuting, culture shock, trying to heal trauma and discrimination both in their homelands and in Vancouver.

The objective of the project has been to include a group of youth that have been excluded from most social settings or have
been isolated because of difficulties accessing spaces, resources, services and other opportunities. Nevertheless, having youth participants as well as volunteers, artists and organizers from all backgrounds, cultures and experiences is one of the priorities of the project and is a key component to address cultural diversity as something that is celebrated and seen as an asset and not as a barrier.

An important value that is prioritized when recruiting artists, volunteers and youth is that they demonstrate respect and acknowledgment of differences as a way to build bridges and connect with each other to learn and add to our understanding of the social fabric of a city like Vancouver.

The deliverables of the project, have been comic books showcasing the youth stories. The publications are intended to reach a wide audience. By using illustration and drawing the youth have the freedom to express themselves visually, be able to reflect on their own cultural perspective and experience. The youth participants can use English in their comic dialogue boxes if they feel comfortable. They are also welcomed to write the dialogues in their mother tongue or not use text at all. It is entirely their discretion to determine how they choose to illustrate and convey their stories. Using comics ensures that no matter which way they communicate, their story is accessible to a wider audience. It allows others to learn more about participants personal experiences and opens a small window to their
background, culture, sociopolitical, geographical and historical context. Additionally, the project seeks to identify the skills and assets that a diverse group of youth bring to the city and to identify the challenges immigrant/refugee youth face in Vancouver. This in turn can catalyze the creation of spaces and programs for youth that address these challenges.

Although, the outcome of the project is to have a story in a printed comic book for each one of the participants to share; the process is as important because it aims to empower the youth and give them voices to feel more confident and comfortable about their differences, their skills and strengths.

The coordinators of the project have a participatory evaluation process in which monitoring activities are designed with the input of the youth participants. The evaluation techniques also incorporate the recommendations, comments, fears and ideas shared at the end of the workshops.

The artists, volunteers and other members of the team are not only invited to give their input but also obligated to participate in planning meetings, content of workshops, facilitation, logistics, socializing and recreational activities, evaluation and design, layout and collation of the community exhibition to share the comics.
Community collaboration and partnerships have occurred at different levels. Funding is provided from different organizations such as the Vancouver Foundation, CKNW Orphans Fund, the Francophone Federation of BC and La Boussole. At a community level, some schools, neighborhood houses, transition houses for refugee and immigrant families, settlement organizations like Immigrant Services Society of BC as well as churches provide support to the project particularly during the youth recruitment process.

Collaboration and partnership is essential to the success of a community-based project like this one. It is important to recognize the efforts, resources, services, and assets that other groups and agencies are doing to address social exclusion particularly with immigrants and refugees. Partnering with these groups and agencies has the potential to compound the effect of positive change and opportunity more so than individual and isolated efforts. As more immigrant and refugees and agencies are involved in these changes, the more inclusive and healthy the community in Vancouver will become.

### 3.4 The importance of art, storytelling and comics to achieve social inclusion

Art has been part of the spiritual and mental lives of women and men of all cultures and all ages.

Visual metaphors and images give youth the opportunity to imagine and create new and different ways of communicating.

Art can create a space to generate a new discourse that includes racial differences.

When an individual voice isn’t heard it creates frustration and tension. Although discussions about difference and identity can be painful and dangerous, in societies like the Canadian where the multicultural discourse emphasizes the politically correct attitude that avoids confrontation it is important to open a genuine and real dialogue to be able to learn, bridge and celebrate diversity.

Using art and storytelling offers unique ways of working with differences and identity struggles. Using art to address challenges of
discrimination and isolation allows us to use images of how we perceive ourselves and reinvent ourselves in as many different ways to be able to share our stories about who we are and our journeys.

“When this power to recreate images of the self as part of the ongoing narrative of the group which is both personal and shared becomes a crucial instrument of healing and redefining. Active engagement feeds self-confidence, affirms self-worth and counteracts feelings of disconnectedness and unbelonging.” (Campbell J., Liebmann M., Brooks F., Jones J. and Ward C. 1999. p. 30)

When using art and storytelling with mixed racial groups there are different visual and verbal narratives that create opportunities to find multiple meanings and stories.

When using art to address trauma or isolation the image is effective because it holds feelings and experiences that are difficult to communicate or articulate, therefore the complexity of the feelings can be addressed.

By using art through images and metaphors, it is possible to examine the different meanings of color referring to race or a political or social reality and to express deep feelings. These are portrayed symbolically and in turn create a visual narrative for interpretation and understanding.

When we share stories translated through images and talk about them we create different meaning or meanings together.

Using art in groups to make images and have a dialogue about them and what we feel becomes a ‘ceremony of redefinition’. Myerhoff, B. 1982 p. 191

The challenge is for the youth participants to be able to see, hear and respect different stories of otherness.

My capacity as a facilitator of this project is to shape a process for safe dialogue where the youth through art, stories, images and metaphors share their experiences and find new ways of understanding who they are and embrace their experiences by changing the beliefs about themselves.

The process, as well as the stories printed in a comic, painting, photo, video, poem, etc. is all part of a new meaning and narrative.
Facilitation through the art of diverse groups provides a safe setting where cultural identity, differences and conflicts can be expressed and recognized through their images, metaphors and storytelling.

Storytelling through art is a powerful way to reflect on struggles of identity and belonging. It creates the possibilities as immigrants and refugees to reconcile culture and “past” identities with possibilities in the future. It allows immigrants and refugees to acknowledge, keep, change, transform and reinvent themselves recognizing where we come from with acceptance and celebration.

Using a specific form of art to share stories gives the opportunity to document our journeys and reflections on our identity and culture. By documenting through art it creates a new form of knowledge and understanding and helps build a dynamic identity with others.
Engaging immigrant and refugee youth facing multiple challenges of isolation and discrimination by sharing their stories through art empowers participants with tools of resistance to assimilation. It is an opportunity to access and speak out with personal voice, their stories and experiences.

It is important to give the youth an awareness of the differences with creative tools to communicate through images from their perceived position of difference.

My personal experiences with newcomer youth and women as a community organizer, friend or just in the different roles I have within the projects I work in Vancouver has been one of frustration and sadness at times yet very enlightening and hopeful.

As a Mexican woman working in diverse intercultural settings I am constantly trying to reflect on my own privilege and power and I am aware that using storytelling and art as a tool for social transformation and empowerment can also lead to abuse, manipulation and racial or cultural stereotyping. I do believe and have experienced, that having an open dialogue where we allow ourselves and youth participants to make mistakes even if it might be uncomfortable, is far more effective than being politically correct because we are afraid to engage in a real dialogue.
CHAPTER 4.
FINDINGS AND RESULTS

4.1 Participatory evaluation methods

Three specific participatory evaluation methods are used with the Illustrated Journey Project. A fourth method (video) is also used as both an evaluation method and documentation tool. The description of these methods articulates why this approach is taken, the positive and negative attributes associated with its application, and suggestions for future implementation.

Collage: The first method of participatory evaluation is to create collages. The goal of this activity is to assemble posters with images from magazines, posters and other media. Participants are required to select images that reflect important aspects of their involvement with the Illustrated Journey Project. This includes requesting them to select pictures representing their feelings, situations or places that they felt relevant as expressions related to what they liked about going to the workshops. Another poster was created using the same process. This required selecting images that expressed what they would add to the workshops to make the space more comfortable and safe to tell stories and share.

This method creates some pressure related with providing immediate results or outcomes in terms of the way youth participate and give their feedback. It is a technique that has invoked a number of assumptions of how the coordinator and planning team expect the youth might participate and share what they felt about the project overall. While all the youth have been engaged in choosing images and writing words on blank paper
that was given to them (to add supplementary comments not obvious in the images alone) there were interesting outcomes. When facilitators tried to engage the youth in a discussion about the images they picked and why they picked them, there was hesitation. A couple of participants spoke but they seemed to pick images according to things that they liked to do in their lives not how they felt overall (like people playing their favorite sport, their favorite food or places that they would like to visit). The youth selection of images and explanation was not related to the workshops or how comfortable or uncomfortable they felt there. There are many things to analyze about the images that are important to the workshop but it is important too, to identify issues of translation and comprehension as a result of the language differences. This was a key challenge that could have been avoided with more translators.

Questionnaire: The next participatory evaluation method involves use of a questionnaire.

The format uses smiley faces- depicting yes, no, and 'kind of' as responses. The questions address one or two of the main objectives of the Illustrated Journey project. The coordinator and planning team aim to assess which were the most prevalent issues expressed during the workshops. Language barriers and lack of social networks and spaces for expression have been common responses. The implementation of this method is achieved by dividing the overall group of participants into smaller groups according to their dominant language. This makes it easier for translation and more comfortable for the youth to ask questions and share in smaller groups. To illustrate an example of
feedback provided, more than 50% of the youth think that drawing helps them to express themselves better and more than 60% consider that they made new friends by coming to the workshops.

Brainstorming: This participatory evaluation method is also conducted in small groups according to language. It is the final strategy that is implemented with all participants in the project. Four questions are written on a large sheet of poster paper and group members are requested to write their comments or have them translated and written on the sheet. The basic idea of this method is to obtain feedback about the ways in which the workshop helps communication, promote shared stories and facilitate reflections about personal feelings during and after the workshops. The strategy of encouraging participants to write their own answers aims to strengthen the ownership of the project as well as to promote leadership among the group. At the end of the activity a designated person or the whole group were requested to present their ideas to everyone. It was found that this approach made a big difference. Sharing the brainstorming observations enhanced commonalities and presents an opportunity of learning from each other.

4.2 Results

Youth participants quote:

“I like to draw now, and people are kind and they like to welcome others”
“I like everyone here because no one is mean and no problems”
“I would like it if there was more room for participants to speak up and give their opinion”
• Drawing not only was a tool to express feelings and getting to know each other but also to improve English
• The participants thought it was important to share stories, to understand the differences and similarities of their experiences, as well as to learn about other cultures and to connect and build together.
• The participants indicated that they felt excited and good when they were at the workshops and they would like to stay for more hours.
• Using art and comic techniques helped the youth overcome the language barrier by telling and sharing their stories through illustration
• The youth participants built connections and friendships with the artists/mentors
• The youth participants built friendships and connections among themselves
• The youth participants built confidence and self esteem through the process of sharing their stories and learning a new skill
• The youth participants developed leadership skills
• The youth participants gained public speaking skills
• The youth participants gained storytelling techniques
• The youth participants were active participants in a community based participatory project
• The youth participants spoke out about what their fears, dreams and aspirations are
• The youth participant shared how they feel in their new home and how they want to feel
• The youth participants acquired drawing and illustration skills
• The youth participants acquired comic book making skills
• Stories of immigrant/refugee youth participants are published in a comic book
• All those who are engaged can learn from the journeys, background and culture of the home countries of all the participants and members of the project
The Illustrated Journey participants and planning team underwent a learning process and social transformation where it was possible to learn new things about ourselves and our community. The Illustrated Journey youth participants developed drawing skills, storytelling and artistic skills, leadership skills, public speaking skills and most important they reflected about their identity, their belonging and who and how they envision themselves within their community in their new home, in Vancouver.

4.3 Findings

They strengthen their self esteem, their English language skills and their confidence on contributing with their cultural heritage, knowledge and experiences into a dynamic Canadian identity.

The artists/mentors strengthened their teaching and mentoring skills as well as their participatory planning skills. The artists not only share their talents but also their ability to support and welcome immigrant and refugee youth through the sharing of their own journeys and life stories.

The youth participants along with the artists/mentors and the coordinating team learn through the challenges of adapting to the changing and diverse needs of the youth. All those engaged in the project learned how to build a safe space of trust and belonging. Collaboratively the project members learned how to put together an exhibition and celebrate as a community the hope of building more inclusive and welcoming communities.

The mentor/artists were able to teach and transmit their skills in the areas where their
trained artistic expertise has been refined. They also improve and learn from the other artists/mentors.

It is challenging to measure the qualitative effects of the project considering that it is a community based initiative and it is meant for only a small group of youth. There is much to say about the way the project affects the youth participants and their families. The families and siblings of the youth are influenced by the active role that the youth start developing through the project. The youth participants become more out spoken and engaged as well as more interested in their new cultural surroundings. The families give feedback to the planning team about how enthusiastic and more confident their kids feel as the project progresses. The participants start feeling more comfortable and confident in their new school and new home and this has a big impact in the family health. The parents feel encouraged by their kids to get involved in activities were they can share their assets and challenges with other families that go through the same process of settling in Vancouver. It builds networks with the parents of the other youth participants to realize and raise awareness that they are not the only ones that are going through the hardship of learning a language, finding a house, a job and building a community without having to quit to their culture, their beliefs and their understanding of the world.

For both the youth and their families, being part of a project where they realize that there are other people and families going through similar challenges and through the process of learning about the services and opportunities that the city of Vancouver offers is empowering.

The publishing of the comics and the exhibition raises awareness with other members of the community particularly organizations and agencies that give services to immigrants and refugees. It is an excellent way to showcase the importance and outcomes associated with the provision of space for youth to get together, exchange stories and contribute in their communities in a positive way.

Other refugee and immigrant youth also benefit from the stories and experiences that the youth participants share. The comics demonstrate how there is other youth just like them that face similar challenges. The exhibition shows how by participating in a program like the Illustrated Journey, they are able to build networks, strengthen their leadership skills, self esteem and feel more included in their new home.
After 6 months in Belgium, de 7O day after 2 months.

After 6 months in Belgium, after 2 months.

After 6 months in Belgium, after 2 months.

Bulgaria

After 6 months in Belgium, after 2 months.

In Belgium I played marbles with my friend with my parents, Jonathan.
The published stories are printed into a comic book that is given to the youth participants, their friends, their families and their communities. It has also been used at a community exhibition at the end of each project where the youth showcase the stories that they wanted to share and talk about their experience and process through this project as well as their experience in relationship to the challenges they face as refugee and immigrant youth in Vancouver.

The comic book has been shared with other organizations and agencies that work with immigrants and refugees as well as funders in order to raise awareness and promote the creation of similar spaces that use art and stories to help youth integrate, share and feel included in a new environment.

The stories and presentation of the project has also been used in academic settings as a practical example that speaks about the importance of participatory and community planning as well as how stories and alternative knowledge creation shape urban spaces in a more inclusive and diverse way.
CHAPTER 5.
REFLECTION ON PROJECT PROCESS

5.1 Effect on community and host organization

In the future it will be important to expand the Illustrated Journey Youth project process. This can be achieved by using the stories of the youth and the participation of former youth participants in future projects, programming and services. Allowing these youth to stay involved in the organization can help La Boussole to achieve their goals and benefit more youth.

The youth participants have been involved in volunteering and working in other projects and programs related to support immigrant and refugees during their transition in Canada. Some of the youth participants performed in a multicultural arts and crafts market held at La Boussole to support immigrant and refugee women showcase their talents and find alternative livelihood strategies. The youth have also participated in facilitating comic making activities with other youth in other organizations and are also now involved in several programs and projects for youth around the city.

Some of the youth participants after being involved with the Illustrated Journey were invited to join the Youth Philanthropy council of Vancouver Foundation having a vote in how the funding is spent for other youth initiatives. Three of the youth participants are part of a youth advisory committee to organize a youth summit.
focusing on newcomer youth experiences and voices.

“Before I came here to Canada I did not listen to other languages or met people from so many different countries, I like to learn from other cultures” Lorena del Castillo, youth participant.

The language differences have made the process richer and reflected the reality of Vancouver youth. These differences make the process challenging as well because project facilitators have to revisit the English language level of each one of the participants to address their specific needs and learning processes.

5.2 Factors influencing outcomes

Being a community project has very positive catalyzing elements. These include:
- A sense of ownership which results in commitment, participation and shared responsibility;
- Built relationships and roles which are understood as a way to be accountable to each other and as a way to achieve a common goals;
- Group reflection on the individual and group strengths that could possibly expand into creating change in other ways in their families, communities and society;
- An understanding of each others experiences and the sharing of differences in a safe environment to which can address isolation, low self confidence and internalized oppression.

Some of the most important factors influencing the project are the multiple perspectives, lenses, assets, awareness and cross cultural understanding of the artists/tutors and the organizing team.

Another influencing factor of this project is the outreach and support not only of the funding organizations but also from:
Socially aware and cross culturally sensitive teachers from schools with a high number of immigrant and refugee students;
Transition houses for refugee families;
Neighborhood houses;
Churches with a high number of immigrant/refugee families;
Affiliations, friends and connections of the project organizing team members.

There is flexibility to allocate the budget according to the needs of the participants and to support them with transportation,
food, individual mentoring and follow up with families. The organizing team works hard to give special attention to the youth participants through the learning process of the comic making. They also give attention to the sharing of the stories and address specific language difficulties and lack of confidence.

Another element that has been very important is prioritizing the process without neglecting the commitment to the outcome. A major budget allocation is given to printing of the comics also to the community exhibition in which the youth participants are able to share their processes, their stories and celebrate.

Being a small group of youth also allows the opportunity to build close and solid relationships among each other and among the rest of the team. This allows the stories to flow in a setting where everyone can feel heard, respected and safe. Honoring the stories allows for healing, reflection and the creation of change.

5.3 Limiting factors

Some of the important limiting factors of the project have been funding. As a consequence there are limited human and material resources available. As much as it is easy to build trust and close relationships in a small group, this could also be possible with a
bigger group of participants if there was adequate funding and resources.

To give an example, I want to mention how challenging it was to recruit comic book artists considering how specific and unique the comic book talent in Vancouver is. It is already difficult for comic book artists to make an income from producing their comics. The Illustrated Journey project allocates some honorarium for the comic book artists to acknowledge and appreciate their work and commitment to the project but at the same time to celebrate that there are artists who are socially and politically concerned and aware that would voluntarily commit to promote social justice in their communities. The Illustrated Journey not only celebrates their artistic talent but also their understanding of refugee and migrant youth challenges.

Another factor that makes this kind of project very challenging is the youth outreach. The language barriers and the isolation that they face makes it really difficult for them to find and access the artists considering how specific and unique the comic book talent in Vancouver is.

In most cases, the immigrant and refugee youth that the Illustrated journey targets usually live in the outskirts of Vancouver.
because it is expensive for their families to find housing in the city. They have other commitments to be able to help their parents with the family income. They do not learn about the resources available for them because of their language differences. Their parents are hesitant to let them commute in a city that is foreign. There is a fear of speaking out which is often based on having experienced discrimination and oppression. Besides, the other challenges that refugees and immigrants share with the rest of the youth in Vancouver is the lack of spaces to explore their creativity, which makes some youth skeptical and not willing to commit to some of the programs and activities offered to them.

Another limiting factor is that this project is hosted by an organization that has as its mandate support for only francophone immigrant and refugee youth. La Boussole made possible this project not as part of their ongoing programs and resources but...
as an external project. The funding for this project comes from special grants that allowed the hiring of a group of committed people to make it happen. This has facilitated the inclusion of refugee and immigrant youth from diverse nationalities and backgrounds. Although there is institutional support during the implementation of the project, the follow up and capacity building after the project would not be possible without the funding to do it. Most of the staff of La Boussole have their own roles and responsibilities at the organization leaving little time to be involved them in the development and progress of the Illustrated Journey project.

In the process of recruiting comic book artists the planning team wanted the artists to be willing to participate not only with the implementation and mentoring of the participants but with the planning and assessment of the specific needs of the youth. Before the first workshop an orientation and training session was organized for the artists, volunteers and other contributing members so that the group could envision collaborative expectations, roles, responsibilities and objectives.

Adopting a participatory approach is not always smooth and easy. It does address the needs and challenges that participants identify as well as enriches the process and has a bigger qualitative impact in their lives and the group and organization. Nevertheless, it can make the process slower and without an envisioning exercise each member can have a different agenda and objective that needs to be negotiated as a group.

This envisioning process and orientation has helped foster greater commitment to the process. The planning team developed a sense of ownership and accountability to accomplish the goals and to address the changes that the project needed to have in order to reach its overall objectives.
When we share stories about who we are, how we feel and express our experiences through painting, illustration, singing, photography and we discuss how we feel with a group, family, friends and community throughout our lives we are creating a dialogue and redefining ourselves in a dynamic way.

We need to shift our perspective when working with mixed racial groups to be able to understand that meaning is not fixed but it is created by dialogue, in the language used between one person and another.

By creating this dialogue we understand and acknowledge that there is not one truth but multiple meanings and lived experiences and the participants in the project are the experts in their own lives and stories.

Through this project my personal goal was to make the youth feel adequate, included and heard and that we honor their stories of survival and difference. Through the process of facilitating a space to share stories and feelings of challenging experiences by drawing and expressing with art I wanted to promote a positive and accepting view of themselves, their experiences and the others.

I wanted the participants to feel confident and proud of whom they are where they come from and how incredible is to be different and meet people with similar experiences and also from very different cultures and experiences.

I wanted the youth participants to see their differences as an opportunity not as a burden or something to be ashamed of therefore the need to assimilate. By shifting the approach of seeing immigrants and refugees as a problem or their differences as problematic we find an opportunity for learning and acknowledging how much their experience and differences contribute to redefining meaning and understanding.

To communicate across difference we need to understand that stereotyping, labeling and judging would put limitations to fully understand the possibilities of a person.
If we see the immigrant and refugee youth experiences of racism as an illness we perpetuate the effects but if we listen, learn and celebrate their stories of survival, adaptation and triumph we can move on to build new understandings and connections.

The learning process in this project has been on going. From a personal journey of reflecting on my own identity and belonging to reflecting on my role as a facilitator and community organizer using storytelling and art with very diverse participants.

I believe in storytelling and art as an emancipating and liberating process although focusing only in the outcome and or the artistic piece or the artist/facilitator/storyteller overshadows what the participants have to voice, and defeats the purpose of using art and storytelling for healing and as an empowering way to address the challenges faced.

Writing and sharing a story that has to do with your personal experience is a painful sometimes healing, sometimes emancipating, sometimes oppressive process. I think that the key is to listen and be aware and self reflective of your own biases and privilege.

I believe in youth as resources, youth as thoughtful and active participants in community change. We need to move forward from thinking of youth as a problem and imposing our beliefs, but we need to open spaces for immigrant and
refugee youth to meaningfully engage in the cultural, social and political life of their communities.

I am really hopeful about the possibilities of building spaces of unity within diversity by being an observer and participant of the process of making art, using symbolic expression and metaphors for sharing sometimes painful or challenging experiences. The youth participants found deep connections among differences as well and the differences were not a source of misunderstanding but of self reflection, learning empowerment and transformation.

I would also like to highlight the importance of reflection on the impact of non profit organizations in community development, social transformation and political change. Thinking of civil society efforts through non profit organizations as apolitical will not let us analyze and identify the power relationships and the structural problems of inequalities and poverty. We should reflect and negotiate “development” within all the stakeholders in a community project. We need to be aware of the context, culture and relationships.

“don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now.”

The truth about stories. A Native Narrative. Thomas King. 2003
painting by

Pablo Muñoz

I feel as though I could fly there... to the moon. Do you think my friends will be there?

But I think they may go with you.
REFERENCES


- LeBaron, M. 2003. Bridging Cultural Conflict (San Francisco: Jossey Bass)


- “Monitoring Impact” in IFAD, ANGOC, IRRR, Enhancing Ownership and Sustainability: A Resource Book on Participation (Philippines, India: IFAD, ANGOC, IRRR), pp. 207-264


- **Saurabh Singh.** Art therapy: Characters in this graphic novel find solace in the art of storytelling. India Today. 2009.


- **Campbell J.** Art Therapy, Race, and Culture. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 1999
**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Certificate of Ethics Approval

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**CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL - FULL BOARD**

- **Principal Investigator:** Michael Leaf
- **Institution/Department:** UBC/College for Interdisciplinary Studies/Community & Regional Planning
- **UBC BRED Number:** H09-00246

**Institution(s) Where Research Will Be Carried Out:**

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<tr>
<td>UBC</td>
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**Co-Investigator(s):**

N/A

**Sponsoring Agencies:**

N/A

**Project Title:** The Illustrated Journey Youth Project

**REB Meeting Date:** March 12, 2009

**Certificate Expiry Date:** March 12, 2010

**Documents Included in This Approval:**

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The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human subjects.

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*Approval is issued on behalf of the Behavioural Research Ethics Board and signed electronically by one of the following:*

- Dr. M. Judith Lynam, Chair
- Dr. Ken Craig, Chair
- Dr. Jim Rupert, Associate Chair
- Dr. Laurie Ford, Associate Chair
- Dr. Anita Ho, Associate Chair
## Appendix 2 List of youth participants

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<th>Age</th>
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