

# BRIDGING THE GAP

NEWCOMERS' VOICES

SSHRC  CRSH



UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY  
WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

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## RENT THE FILM

Bridging the Gap can be rented through Moving Images.

Rent the film [here](#).



SCAN ME  
> Rent the film here

# LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.

The University of Calgary is situated on land Northwest of where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina. On this land and in this place, we strive to learn together, walk together, and grow together "in a good way."

## BACKGROUND

The current unsettled global political climate around immigration has resulted in an unprecedented number of newcomers seeking asylum, with nearly half of these newcomers being school-aged children. Host countries have become responsible for providing educational programming, and language lessons, and developing strategies for bolstering these children's physical and mental well-being.

Consequently, a dire demand has been created for increased research on the optimal ways to integrate newcomer families into mainstream society, while simultaneously recognizing and addressing their unique backgrounds and challenges. For most families, particularly the children, schools are the initial and main point of contact during the first few critical years of transition.

### The Albertan Immigration Overview

Since 1980, close to one million immigrants have chosen to make Alberta their new home and, in the past 10 years alone, the province has welcomed approximately 400,000 immigrants, the majority of whom are between 25 and 44 years of age. Alberta has identified over 1,000,000 people as being visible minorities (e.g., South Asian, Chinese, Black, Arab, Latin American, etc.) and today, over two-thirds of its population is made up of second and third-generation

immigrants with multiple ethnic backgrounds. With so many newcomers immigrating to the province, there is little doubt that foundational challenges exist, including social integration, language, education, employment, racialization, and housing.

With this in mind, a partnership-engaged grant brought stakeholders together to develop strategies to respond to the guide's objectives. The guide incorporates the use of the documentary, entitled "Bridging the Gap".

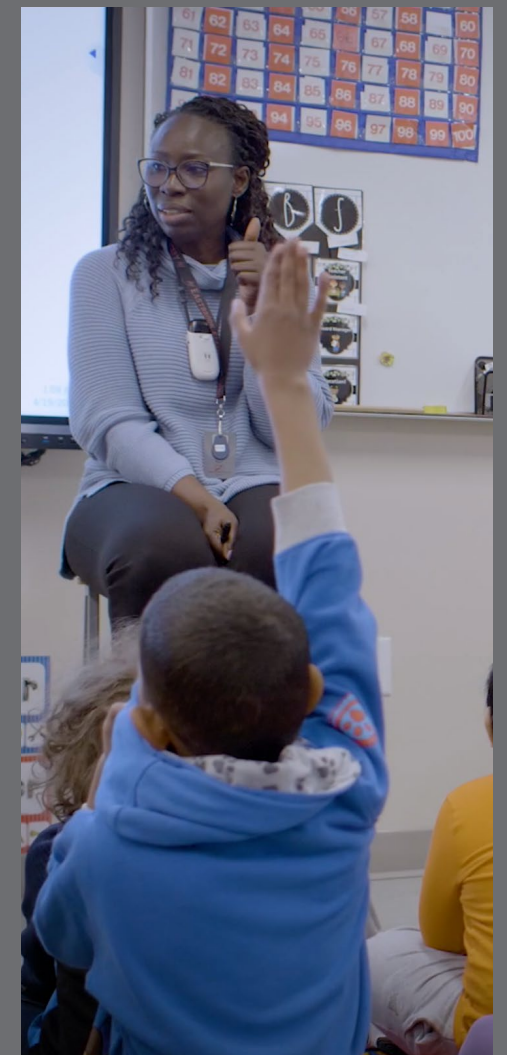
The use of film is effective to mediate difficult conversations on challenging topics, particularly given language and literacy barriers. It puts a personal face on the numbers and statistics that often dominate the media on the topic of immigration, and allows real people to take part in its creative use to share their own lived experiences of resettlement. Using film can also develop an enhanced curriculum and/or research practice, encouraging educators to be more culturally responsive through different modalities (e.g., film and storytelling).

The documentary highlights stories of newcomers that emerged through a strengths-based, resilient lens that highlighted the depth of these families' investment in both their future and in their children's education. This was often cited as driving forces behind the difficult choices and sacrifices these families had to make to come to Canada.



### The specific objectives of the documentary are:

1. To create a professional development resource for school boards, individual teachers, researchers, and teacher education programs to use when exploring newcomer families' successful integration into and collaboration with the school system;
2. To incorporate an autonomous, first-person account of the refugee experience and parents' role as active agents in their children's education;
3. To foster productive and positive relationships between resettled families and school/university partners;
4. To examine mental health and well-being through film and image work.





THE  
DOCUMENTARY

BRIDGING THE GAP

## PROMOTING CONVERSATION IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH



Newcomer communities are still marginalized on stances of race, cultural and religious traditions, gender identity, sexuality, and language to name a few, hence, this is a pivotal opportunity to challenge dominant and exclusionary beliefs. This guide will be helpful in starting up, continuing, and furthering conversations in classrooms, universities, and social organizations.

This resource is committed to dismantling inequities, marginalization, discrimination, and oppression, and can be used to raise awareness and call out community stakeholders to take action.

Given the intricate dynamics some of the topics might provoke, the resource guide provides helpful tips on guiding discussions and responding to any challenging situations.



The principal goals of the guide are as follows: Through careful and thoughtful conversation, the guide seeks.

1. To understand how newcomer families experience their integration into society.
2. To understand how newcomer families experience integration into the school system.
3. To understand how the mental health and well-being of newcomer families affects these processes (integration into Canadian society and school systems).

## Helpful Tips for Proactive Conversation

The Government of Canada has created the [Guide to Courageous Conversations on Racism and Discrimination](#), which is a document that encourages a [Call to Action on Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion](#). This guide prepares anyone who is interested in engaging in conversations to think of:

1. Their readiness to promote/participate in such discussions,
2. Their intersectional identity layers and positionality,
3. Their pre-conceived assumptions,
4. Their own unseen marginalizing/oppressive attitudes towards others, and
5. Critical reflections that can result from these conversations.



SCAN ME  
> Guide To Courageous  
Conversations



SCAN ME  
> Call to Action on  
Anti-Racism, Equity,  
and Inclusion

## Some helpful tips to consider when conducting conversations that may include sensitive topics:

Be clear and open about the purpose of the conversation before inviting people and during the conversation

Set ground rules for respectful conversation

Active listening is a must

Remain open, with curiosity modeled by responding with questions before responding with your own interpretation or explanation of impact in regards to someone else's comments

Recognize and acknowledge people's experiences; the person/people you are in conversation with are bringing their own perspective, shaped by their own experiences (culture, history, practices and upbringing)

Be mindful to take breaks to re-centre when conversations feel uncomfortable or too wrought with conflict to be productive. Build in moments for deep breathing, pauses to reflect and re-centre, and moments to be aware of mind, body, and emotional alignment

Everyone has agency, and, regardless of agreement and alignment, everyone is worthy of being valued in the dignity of their humanity

Dismantling racism is not a checklist, a meeting, or a one-time commitment; make small, realistic, challenging commitments to grow, learn and evolve

Don't assume intent. Do centre impact over intent.





## Sample Discussion Planning

Activity	Time
Welcome and Greeting	10 minutes
Introductions	20 minutes
Documentary Watching	25 minutes
Post-Documentary	25 minutes
Closing	10 minutes

## WELCOME & GREETINGS

1. Welcome the participants. Introductory activities that highlight the diversity in the room. (e.g., the Bias Jar). This icebreaker activity will require a pen, a jar, and paper.
2. Pose the question:  
**What biases do you expect Bridging the Gap to address?**

Write down one bias you might have about newcomers (anonymous, no stereotypes, ensure comfort level to reflect on positionality).

- After everyone writes down their biases, place them in a jar.
- Each person picks one piece of paper from the jar and shares that bias.

### Prior to Watching the Documentary

General questions prior to sharing the documentary narratives:

- To what extent are you familiar with newcomers' resettlement processes? (Follow-up questions can include: what could be some of the reasons people choose to immigrate?)
- What are some of the challenges

that can accompany newcomers' day-to-day experiences? Why do you think that?

- In a multicultural society, what is still lacking for newcomers to feel included in the different spaces we occupy (e.g., schools, work, community)?

Questions for educators, professionals in the community, and people interested in advocacy for newcomers in specific organizations:

- What is the level of awareness around newcomers' experiences (i.e., within your school/community/organization)?
- How do school curriculum/lessons community programs/employment policies include and/or exclude newcomer narratives?

Questions for researchers/university stakeholders:

- What are some of the inclusive practices you have adopted to include the experiences of newcomers in your research studies?
- What strategies are necessary to reflect research outcomes into society?

A close-up photograph of a hand stirring a pot of beans. The pot is filled with a mixture of yellow and dark beans. The hand is holding a wooden spoon and is in the process of stirring. The background is slightly blurred, showing a kitchen setting with a stove and a striped cloth. The overall image has a dark, muted color palette.

# WATCH THE DOCUMENTARY

POST-DOCUMENTARY DISCUSSION

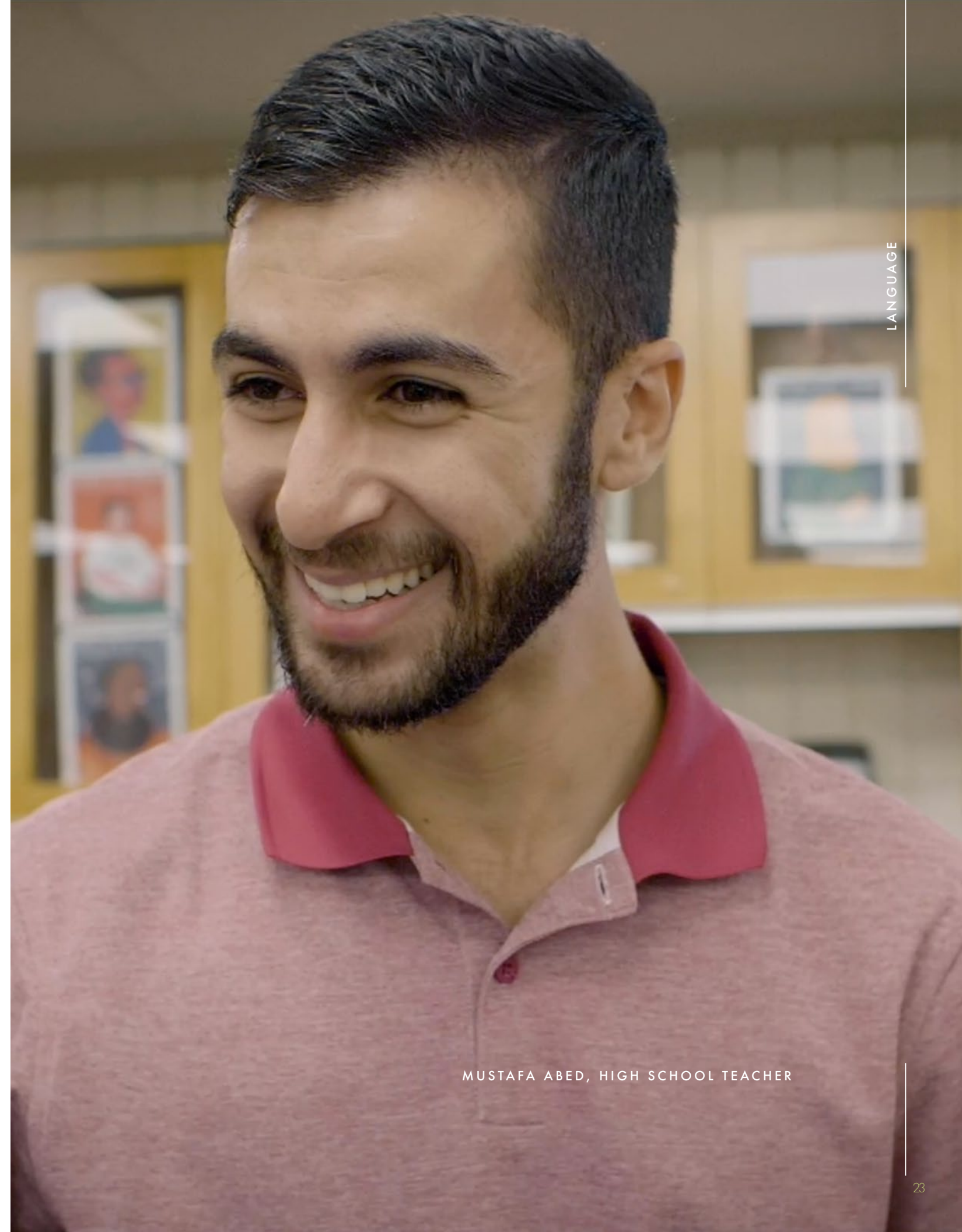
What was a surprising fact you found out about newcomers' experiences through this video?



MICHELLE VEROBA, HIGH SCHOOL VICE PRINCIPAL

*2'40: "The first thing you need is language. And if that is not a factor that's playing, the kids start to give up."*

*4'53: "I remember stressing about it [language] a lot. [...] I put in that much dedication into it because I wanted to fit in. I didn't want to feel like an outsider."*



MUSTAFA ABED, HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

**3'29:** *"These teachers think I'm stupid, I'm not meant to be here. I don't deserve to be here."* (Musa Muhdin)

### Questions

It was stated that newcomer families' first challenge has to do with language. Once attending school, newcomer students need to overcome language barriers and learn a new curriculum. Mustafa reflected, "I had to put in much dedication" into overcoming those barriers.

#### Questions:

- From an agency point of view, to what extent are schools depositing an adjustment responsibility onto newcomers and distancing themselves from the issue?
- What should the role of school administration/educators/researchers be to help newcomers navigate language barriers and school curricula?

### Native Language Issues

#### For educators:

How can students' first language be incorporated into their everyday learning?

#### For researchers:

How can research be aligned with the different language and knowledges that newcomer participants bring to research practices?

## CLASS PLACEMENT



IFRAH ABDILLE, PARENT

*6'42: "When a kid's school life is not good then their life gets harder."*

*7'01: "Their academic qualifications should be determined based on what they know".  
(Joseph Octavious)*

**Question:**

When we see an educational system that does not consider the different layers that constitute an individual's knowledge, what chances of fitting in and belonging are educators and researchers, in fact, providing to newcomers?



EDNA AYENI,  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER

*8'06: "We have a new curriculum, and it is packed. You want to be able to teach the kids what they need so they can succeed."*

## SUPPORT

Consider the excerpt above and discuss the following questions:

- Considering the stories heard in the documentary, what do you think "succeeding" would look like?
- As educators and researchers, what sorts of adjustments have occurred within school curricula to support newcomers' success? Are there any gaps?





PARENT

9'20: "That's why at least we have to keep the tradition for our children."

## CULTURE

### Question:

- What does being "culturally responsive" mean to you?
- How can we foster cultural responsiveness and inclusion in schools and society?

### For teachers:

What does implementing different cultural traditions in the classroom look like to you?

### For researchers:

The universities are filled with individuals from different backgrounds. How do those differences translate into more equitable, diverse, and inclusive practices?



13'09: "Whoever says that racism does not exist in Canada, does not exist at school, that person does not live on earth. [...] Racism is real" (Joseph Octavious).

## RACISM

### Questions:

What examples of (systemic) racism do you think of before addressing them in schools and research?

### Follow-Up:

- How do systemically racist attitudes show up in your day-to-day practices?
- What role do school staff (e.g., principals, teachers, education assistants, etc.) play in acknowledging and working against racism in schools?
- What are the current research limitations in addressing racism in academia? What, if any, are some ways to mitigate those?





## EMPATHY

### Questions:

What are some of the strategies for fostering empathy toward newcomers highlighted in the documentary?

### Continuing the Discussion:

#### For educators:

- In schools, what role do we have in developing a welcoming, safe, and inclusive environment for newcomers?
- To what extent should schools be responsible for creating belongingness affordances among newcomers?
- Aside from voicing newcomers' concerns and experiences, what opportunities are universities creating to counteract some of the dominant Western narratives in education?
- What role can the university play in strengthening newcomers' sense of belonging in different communities?



BRIDGING THE GAP

# CLOSING ACTIVITY

## WHAT ARE SOME QUESTIONS YOU STILL HAVE?

What are some of the ways to move forward with these discussions in our practices? Provide some examples. These may include:

1. Developing lesson plans that incorporate the discussions that happened following this guide.
2. Addressing the current limitations in curriculum and teaching.
3. Creating research methodology strategies that can address newcomers' concerns and experiences.
4. Thinking of ongoing challenges that newcomers face and proposing studies that will revisit research and policy agendas.

## Responding to challenging Situations



Be aware that newcomers' challenges vary from person to person. Not all newcomers experience distress in the same way, despite their similar processes.



Be educated about different cultural aspects that might inform the dynamics and nature of conversations you will be having. Avoid stereotypes!



Mental health and well-being can be part of newcomers' day-to-day experiences. Be ready to offer online and in-person resources that can help discussants develop coping skills.



Build a supportive network with the participants in your discussion.



## KNOWLEDGE DISSEMINATION

### Brooks Class of 2023: Making meaningful change, together

Werklund research team facilitates 2-year anti-racism effort led by Brooks Composite High School students and administration.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

AUTHOR

ZOLTAN VARADI, WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



Check out our website

[ABOUT TRANSLITERACIES](#)



SCAN ME  
> Website

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