

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by – **ISOBEL ROSE CREALY** – *2014 Churchill Fellow*

THE PETER MITCHELL CHURCHILL FELLOWSHIP to investigate language and cultural inclusion programs illustrating best practice in the integration of adolescent refugee students – Canada, USA.

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Summary of Study

This study attempts to identify best practice in the development of language and cultural inclusion programs to assist in adolescent refugee integration. Its intention is to inform and form part of future educational and community programs and policies, made more germane by the anticipated increase in refugee arrivals to Australia.

A crucial component of this project was the first-hand observation and discussion with teachers and administrators as to how they saw current teaching practice impact on refugee student learning. Accordingly, I visited a number of school districts in Salt Lake City and Toronto where I compared and benchmarked classroom- and school-based approaches and initiatives.

I also visited university departments conducting research in Refugee Studies, Cultural Psychology and Education, as well as providing pre-service teachers with information and training about refugee issues. I consulted with academics as to the nexus between research, integration and practice in terms of refugee integration and the empowering of minority groups and the adolescent members of these groups.

Finally, this research involved semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and not-for-profit administrators that work in collaboration with refugee communities. These interviews identified successful community-centred programs seeking to engage adolescent refugees with the wider community and the education system. They allowed too for the mapping of successful partnerships and collaborations that occur across – inter alia – the social services, education, and health sectors.

Acknowledgements

I want first and foremost to thank the Churchill Trust and the Peter Mitchell Foundation for the opportunity to conduct international research and to engage with the international community of educators. This invaluable experience has allowed me to investigate the myriad of approaches to refugee integration employed in Salt Lake City and Toronto, and accordingly to catalogue potential future pathways to employ in Australia in terms of the education, empowerment and engagement of adolescent refugees.

I want to acknowledge the assistance of teachers, administrative staff and management in Toronto and Salt Lake City. In particular, I want to thank Megan Olsen, Gerald Brown, Amy Wylie, Christina Clark-Kazak, Michaela Hynie and Peter Tse for providing me with invaluable information and assisting me in making connections with other relevant individuals.

Thank you to my parents for their interminable encouragement, to Norma and Des Crawley for their mentorship and friendship, as well as to Michael Harme for his ongoing professional support.

Executive Summary

The Peter Mitchell Churchill Fellowship to investigate language and cultural inclusion programs illustrating best practice in the integration of adolescent refugee students – Canada, USA.

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I think we're lucky to have refugees here. I think they are the epitome of human resilience and I think from hearing their stories, you can get so much inspiration about what's possible; it puts things in perspective.... Our philosophy and our job is the integration of the community – so it's not just refugees 'being like us', it's also getting the community to understand how valuable they are, to welcome them and even to learn from them.

Gerald Brown,

Director of Refugee Services

Utah Department of Workforce Services

On September 10 2015, I spoke to Gerald Brown as part of research into best practice in the integration of adolescent refugee students into host communities. He has worked with refugees in the United States and abroad for more than three decades and he continues to bring his knowledge, enthusiasm, compassion and intelligence in the field of refugee integration and participation. Whilst the information and contacts he provided were invaluable, it was his positive attitude about integration and passion for social change that profoundly affected me and, in turn, has shaped my research. The notion that refugees are an asset and a source of knowledge and who have the potential to be an invigorative and transformative force on society has informed the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report. With increased public fear surrounding terrorist threats and rising refugee numbers, such a celebration of mutual integration and toleration is invaluable.

Gerald Brown was but one of the many inspiring administrators, educators and researchers I spoke to over the six weeks spent in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA and Toronto, Canada. This study sought to examine educational and community-based initiatives established to assist adolescent-aged refugees to readjust, to access and to participate equitably in their new societies. Each system offers different responses to issues of settlement and curriculum; objectives, orientation and induction strategies, school and class-based programs in language development, community engagement, resourcing, and staff development.

This research found that best practice can only be developed if informed by

- enhanced curriculum design and development at classroom and school level,
- stronger longitudinal association between the refugee learner and their pathway through the education system,
- higher-order, curriculum-centred research projects, focusing on the unique needs of the refugee within a mainstream educational context.

Importantly, interrupted learning, psychological and sociological trauma and the complexities of competing cultural diversification are unique experiences of refugee students and need to be addressed discretely.

The dissemination of findings will occur at the level of school and teacher, whole school and multi-school professional development, and engagement with national education bodies and commentators. Initially, it is my intention to role model the principles underpinning these recommendations within classroom and school, and in so doing, to formulate linkages with the federal and state governments' response to the Syrian refugee intake. Moreover, the application of findings will operate in conjunction with research initiatives of universities in NSW, particularly in regards to the training of pre-service teachers. The ultimate intention of this research is to influence curriculum development for refugees at the state and federal level.

Salt Lake City

26 August

**University
Neighbourhood
Pathways** **Abdulkhaliq Mohamed**
Manager
Education Pathways Partnership

27–28 August

**Cottonwood High
School** **Kami Sage**
ESL Counsellor

John Draper
Alternative Language Program Chair
Head Teacher, ESL

*Classroom observations and semi-structured
discussions with teaching staff*

**United Way of Salt
Lake** **Megan Olsen**
Cottonwood High Community Director

31 August

**Catholic Community
Services** **Aden Batar**
Director
Immigration and Refugee Resettlement

Randy Chappell
Operations Manager

Jessica Kallin
Coordinator
Refugee Youth Program

**International Rescue
Committee** **Alexx Goeller**
Coordinator
Refugee Youth Program

1 September

**Asian Association
Utah** **Gayane Manukyan**
Coordinator
ESL Program

2 September

**Refugee Education
Initiative** **Amy Wylie**
Executive Director

**Granite Park Junior
High** **Danny Stirland**
Principal

Dayra Gaitan
ESL

Classroom observations

3 September **Granite School District** **Paul A. Ross**
Administrator

4 September **Utah International School** **Angela Rowland**
Principal

Cynthia Bourne
Trustee

Classroom observations and semi-structured discussions with teaching staff

4 & 10 September **Tumaini Welcome & Transition Center** *Classroom observations*
Structured and semi-structured discussions with teaching staff

8 September **Promise South Salt Lake** Mark Lowe
Coordinator
Hser Ner Moo Community Center

Salt Lake Housing Authority **Cassandra Meyers**
Prevention Services Coordinator

9 September **Department of Welfare Services** **Gerald Brown**
Director, Refugee Services Office

English Skills Learning Center **Pamela Silberman**
Associate Director

10 September **Humanitarian Center** **Jennifer Christenson**
Co-ordinator
English Program

Classroom and work observation

Salt Lake City Community College **Diana Bevan**
Manager
Schools Relations Department

Ana Archuleta
Outreach Advisor

Jocelyn Fonua
PACE Advisor

Veronica Aguilera-Sanchez
Technician

Toronto

16 September **York University** **Christina Clark-Kazak**
Acting Director
Centre for Refugee Studies

17 September **York University** **Ranu Basu**
Urban Geography

York University **Susan Kneebone**
Centre for Refugee University of Melbourne
Studies Seminar Series

18 September **York Region District** **Peter Tse**
School Board Principal
Inclusive School and Community Services

York University **Michaela Hynie**
Associate Director
York Health Research Institute

York Region District **Alice Sitt**
School Board Teacher Assessor
Reception Team
Inclusive School and Community Services

21 September **Toronto District** **Tiffany Ford**
School Board Trustee

Ryerson University **Mehrunnisa Ahmad Ali**
Associate Director
Early Childhood Studies Graduate Program

22 September

**North York
Community House** **Rabia Din**
Manager

York University **Marcela Duran**
Course Director
Faculty of Education

23 September

YMCA Toronto **Ashley Korn**
Provincial Programs Manager
Client Support Services Program

*24 September-
1 October*

School Visits **Keith Auyeung**
York Region, North
York, Markham
Centralised ESL/ELD Program Lead
Teacher
York Region District School Board

Teacher Interviews
York Region District School Board

Classroom observations and structured and semi-structured discussions with teaching staff

Teacher Liaison Officer
York Region District School Board

Significance of Research

This study involved six weeks of comparative fieldwork in the multicultural areas of Salt Lake City, Utah in the United States and Toronto, Ontario in Canada. This research was centred on schools, communities and local initiatives serving a large proportion of refugees with the intention of benchmarking how curriculum making and community consultation addressed the needs of adolescent refugee students in their reception, induction and orientation into mainstream schooling and broader society. It sought to elucidate best practice in the empowerment and orientation of refugee adolescents. This was done through observation of the contextual and curriculum-based application of policies in situ, so as to determine if their implementation revealed key principles about, *inter alia*, teaching practice, integration and ESL advocacy and, in turn, whether these principles might be applied to the Australian context(s).

The rationale for this site selection derives from the reality that the United States, Canada, and Australia share similar processes and state/provincial administration of multicultural policy within the education sector, in schools and the broader communities of the United States, Canada and Australia (Breton et al. 1990; Fleras and Elliott 1992). The three nations have become increasingly racially diversified due, in part, to the liberalisation of immigration and refugee policies (Castles 1995: 293-5). Simultaneously, the devaluation of teaching has meant that schools and teachers are no longer seen as agents of change but as agents of society; this is reflected in successive policy shifts relating to funding and outcomes-based assessment, as well as heightened teacher accountability to the vicissitudes of parent and community expectations. The shift in education policies have been influenced by ‘neoliberal global policy trends, resulting in reduced education funding, reduced commitment to humanitarian aid and resettlement of refugees, and a general marginalisation of concerns about equity and social justice in education.’ (Taylor 2008: 3)

In Australia, access and participation for refugee students in the public education system has been compromised by poor transition strategies, with teachers feeling ill-equipped and under-resourced to provide the requisite educational and psycho-social support for the growing numbers of refugee arrivals (Cassity and Gow 2005; Miller et al. 2005). In many cases, too, teachers do not have formal and/or adequate training in ESL, in curriculum making for refugee students, and/or in relevant cultural sensitivity studies. Matthews has claimed that ‘Australian schools are poorly funded and ill-equipped to provide effective English as a Second Language teaching and support.’ (2008: 31. See also Taylor 2008; Sidhu and Taylor 2007) Moreover, there is a disjunction between initial integration programs upon arrival – provided by intensive English language centres for 6-12 months – and support provided after students enter mainstream high school (Christie and Sidhu 2006: 457; Olliff and Couch 2005). In NSW, which receives about 40% of the refugee intake, restricted resource allocations negatively impact on the amount of language and literacy support available (Refugee Council of Australia 2010: 40; Iredal and Fox 1997: 655). There is a real need for increased mediation and reporting on students to ensure that long-term welfare, language, and health needs are addressed across Australia (see Cassity and Gow 2005: 55). Research shows that refugee students can often be lost within the broader school community and accordingly may not have their special needs met in an education system driven by market forces and school-based resource allocation.

Sidhu and Taylor have scrutinised Australian ‘New Arrival’ programs and found that, nationally, refugee needs are commonly conflated with those of other ESL students (2007: 288). Creagh

(2014) too, shows how in the disaggregation of school test data refugees can be included in a Language Background Other than English (LBOTE) category. As this grouping also includes students who may be proficient in English but have non-English speaking parents, the refugee can be ‘rendered invisible’ in testing, policy and curriculum-making (Creagh 2013: 10).

Refugees face distinct and specific issues that impact on educational attainments, including interrupted learning, experience of trauma, and concerns about legal status and family welfare (Stevenson and Willott 2007: 671; Woods 2009: 81). Moreover, these individuals arrive with little conception of the history, culture, principles and practices of the host country. In an era of contracting resource allocation, schools must ensure that curriculum design and development follows best practice to ensure that the unique learning needs of the refugee receive appropriate support. The Refugee Council of Australia has highlighted the many challenges faced by young refugees in ‘making the transition to life in Australia, particularly with regards to their pursuit of education and training.’ (2010: 3) Strategies for overcoming these challenges in practical educational and social settings – such as through targeted curriculum-making for high schools – have not been addressed. Taylor summarises the potential pathways for refugee support when, in her examination of education policy for refugees in Queensland and Australia more generally, she concludes:

schools could play a crucial role in supporting transitions to belonging and citizenship for refugee young people, but ...this will require more support from governments and systems in the form of appropriate policies and strategies, and the provision of adequate resources (2008: 58).

This report investigates the means by which schools and communities might be empowered to support transition, integration and participation for refugee youth. This is done through the observation of practices and initiatives within similar contexts overseas.

At a time of rising concern about terrorism and ‘radicalised’ youth, community- and school-based programs are increasingly important to integrate adolescents to feel like contributing and accepted members of Australian society. This report identifies practices being trialled, implemented and reformed in Salt Lake City and Toronto with the intention that they inform best practice and influence the development of refugee-centred programs within Australia. As Cassidy and Gow emphasise, Australia needs to consider ‘integrated approaches to settlement which focus not only on transition to schools, but also consider the longer term participation of refugee young people in their new society’ (2005: 13).

Key Terms

Integration

Successful integration refers to equal opportunities for access, equity and participation for refugee students within the education system and society. It entails the development and implementation of strategies that promote educational success across a wide range of ages and language proficiency levels.

Best practice

Current writing on best educational practice for refugees is grounded in the need for an inclusive environment, the ability to meet psycho-social needs, and linguistic support (Rutter 2006; Sidhu and Taylor 2009).

Benchmarking

Benchmarking refers to the research practice of validating, explaining and justifying as well as identifying weaknesses in the strategies and teaching practices in a range of sites. Moreover, in this research context, it involves a comparison of student/teacher performance and policy development and implementation. Benchmarking allows researchers to highlight key areas of need and achievement within existing professional practice and approaches to integration.

Methodology

The initial focus of this research was on curriculum making and the development and employment of strategies for educational success across a wide range of ages and language-proficiency levels. It sought to answer the following questions:

How can curriculum making within induction centres best facilitate the transition of adolescent refugees into mainstream school?

What constitutes best practice in the integration and ESL language teaching of adolescent refugee students?

The mooted focus on curriculum design factors such as the formulation of objectives, specific program characteristics and teaching strategies shifted as a result of observational findings as well as changes in interview subjects. Ultimately, the key goal was to discover what positive initiatives (or best practices) were being implemented – as well as what was to be avoided – in the smaller scale strategies of classroom, school and community in Salt Lake City and Toronto.

Key Findings

Case Management and Support

In Salt Lake, settlement services work closely and in conjunction with teachers and school administrators to ensure issues are identified and support supplied to refugee youth. Utah – unique to other US states – provides family case management for up to two years for refugee families, through the national bodies. This period of case management was extended under the auspices of the Director of the Refugee Services in 2009. Before this time, there was no case management after the initial two or three months, meaning that refugees had to find relevant services themselves. Government-approved refugees in Ontario receive only one year of one-on-one case management support for families, mirroring the year of financial support provided by the government. Research conducted by Refugee Services, Utah identified the benefits of long-term case management under a consistent provider, with early handover or subcontracting of services disruptive.

Recommendation 1

Within refugee programming in Australian schools, there needs to be continued and ongoing case management for refugee students so as to prevent vulnerable students from ‘falling through the gaps’. Refugee youth have a propensity to be lost and/or neglected after their initial transition into mainstream schooling, and accordingly, ongoing follow-up and support is imperative. Moreover, this additional support may prevent students from falling behind in subjects, failing to understand school expectations, and/or struggling to make meaningful social connections. The prevention of these issues may help preclude student disenfranchisement, disengagement and radicalisation.

In Salt Lake, settlement agencies have a Youth Program Coordinator to deal with issues relating to refugee youth. This role involves:

- Hosting an orientation with new families on the US Education system,
- Helping with school enrolment and immunisations,
- Promoting after-school and summer school programs,
- Establishing community partnerships and trying to build up the communities’ capacity to best serve refugees. This involves giving presentations in schools about resources such as the library system to empower refugee families to access information through that database,
- Liaising with psychologists in schools with high refugee intake regarding mental health issues that students may have due to trauma or displacement, and which may translate into ‘bad behaviour’,
- Working with the settlement agency’s special needs coordinator to ensure student learning needs are diagnosed and addressed, and that English proficiency is not a barrier to diagnosis,
- Working with the mental healthcare coordinator to ensure ‘flagged’ students are accessing appropriate support services or therapy.

In Utah, settlement agencies have attempted to empower teachers and schools by providing them with easier access to information about their refugee students. They have recently introduced a

concise Family History Form detailing, inter alia, the speaking and literacy skills of student and parents in each relevant language as well as any work experience and educational history.

Recommendation 2

Following from *Recommendation 1*, the production of a specialised form that details, inter alia, student migration history, educational background, targeted classroom management strategies and effective teaching and learning approaches (such as a individual learning plan), is an important step to ensuring continuity throughout an adolescent refugee's school life. It would serve as a useful addendum to student files and would ensure that those students who move between schools receive ongoing and consistent support, as well as tailored learning plans. This continuity would empower the teacher and the learner, and has the potential to combat student disengagement. However, the initiation of this kind of longitudinal data retention would require specialised coordination and cross-school administration. This recommendation envisions a data package that would encapsulate the core information that teachers and related professionals need, so as to have a clear, accurate, precise management and planning tool for each refugee student.

Some Salt Lake schools with a high refugee intake also have Refugee Liaison Officers who provide additional support and seek targeted funding opportunities to benefit refugee students. One such Liaison Officer emphasised her role as a coordinator of external services such as not-for-profit funding and support, as well as conducting analysis of her school population and its data in order to ensure that relevant students access appropriate services.

Community houses and support agencies have been established over the last 25 years in the Greater Toronto Area to help and empower migrants and refugees from within their communities. Each of these service several hundred schools – both public and Catholic – with Settlement Workers who provide settlement services and supportive counselling for students. This includes advocating within the school for additional language support and to ensure refugee students are not left behind. These agencies coordinate to work collaboratively, so as to ensure the demographics of their areas are appropriately serviced. During the summer holidays, these workers are based in local libraries to ensure that students can still access information and support services. One program manager of a community house spoke about the shift to include focus groups with youth and adults to ensure all necessary services are being provided, especially given the very large refugee population. Moreover, she indicated that there was an increasing focus on research, focus groups and grant writing in anticipation of the large number of Syrian refugees to be settled in her catchment.

'Visualising' Need

Refugee students have historically been an invisible or discounted population within mainstream schools, in terms of funding, curriculum making and testing (Keddie 2012). One Refugee Liaison Officer in Utah spoke of the need for a new approach to (or a new measurement of) funding grants that would better captures the needs of school demographics. She emphasised the difficulty in her school accessing targeted government grants, given the school has a high proportion of middle class students that effectively 'mask' those in need. This school recently amalgamated with another, low socio-economic school with a high refugee population. The area in which many of these resettled refugees live has the highest crime rate and the highest percentage of families living in poverty in the state of Utah. These students – many of whom have high learning and language needs – are bussed in and out of the district every day. Although 45% of the school population are entitled to fee-reduced price lunch (for poorer students), the

needs of population is still masked by the middle class population in grant applications. This holistic approach to school funding and support is common, with ESL and refugee student needs often concealed by the population of the school at large (Creagh 2014).

Recommendation 3

Refugees as high-need students must be recognised and assisted as a discrete population, with targeted funding for assistance programs. In several Australian states, non-targeted funding for ESL and/or Special Needs means that these services do not have guaranteed monetary support. It is important that the needs of the student population are reflected in funding for specialist educational programs, resources and staffing.

This Liaison Officer sought funding for the establishment of an after-school program. She identified such a program as essential, not only for providing homework and learning support but also as a means of counteracting the appeal of gang activity and drugs amongst the low socio-economic students being 'bussed' in, and who were not necessarily feeling connected to and engaged with the school community. In the Australian context, student radicalisation and extremism may become an increasing alternative for those disenfranchised students who are not successfully engaged in school and social activities. Mainstream schooling has been shown to alienate students and compound their disconnection from the school community – as McInerney asserts that this 'alienation occurs when students lack meaningful connection to their studies, when they see little relevance in the course content, and when they are effectively disconnected from other students through highly individualized forms of instruction' (2009: 24).

Recommendation 4

Students who are not experiencing academic success and/or social acceptance are at a greater risk of alienation and disengagement. It is important that there is a concerted effort to engage the refugee population within the broader school community. After-school programs are a means to combat radicalisation and disenfranchisement amongst 'at risk' or lower performing populations such as adolescent refugees. These homework and sport-based programs are already operating sporadically across the country, but most are school-based initiatives rather than being driven by the expectations of state and federal education departments.

Community Initiatives

The limitations of funding and the invisibility of need within schools have been identified and addressed through community initiatives within Salt Lake City. University Neighborhood Partners (UNP), for example, has been established as a department within the University of Utah, seeking to bring together the resources of the University and multicultural communities in one of the most disadvantaged regions of Salt Lake City for 'reciprocal learning and benefit'. The UNP is a convener bringing those with similar goals and visions together in a sustainable and mutually consultative way. Two of its core goals are to create education pathways for those new to higher education from elementary school all the way through to college and to build capacity in terms of balancing study and other obligations. The UNP has programs established in high need schools, engaging administrators and parents in goal setting, leadership classes and grants writing. Moreover, through established partnerships, higher education representatives engage with schools to provide students with information and opportunities regarding career directions, skill building and campus visits.

Equally, Promise South Salt Lake is an initiative of the mayor of Salt Lake and the South Salt Lake region. It has established ten neighbourhood centres, both school and community based, with all of them providing programs for local youth, as well as adults and infants. The three main goals or ‘Promises’ are:

1. Every child has the opportunity to attend and graduate from college.
2. Every resident has a safe, clean home and neighbourhood.
3. Everyone has the opportunity to prosper.

All of the centres work to support the youth population of South Salt Lake who have historically struggled with standardised tests and school completion. One centre coordinator claimed that the local school district graduation rate for refugees was 26%, in contrast to the 90% graduation rate of those receiving support from that centre – ‘We’ve had 19 graduates the last couple of years so we are definitely making a difference.’ That centre provides classes for youth every weekday, with nine members of staff and a strong volunteer core. ‘Last year we had 130 volunteers who volunteered about 2500 hours. It’s pretty overwhelming how much community support this Center and Promise South Salt Lake gets.’

The South Salt Lake community centres partner with an English language centre in the training of its volunteers. Native English-speaking volunteers are given twelve hours of training run by ESL professionals before being placed in a variety of Adult ESL programs, including Promise South Salt Lake initiatives. Initially, they team-teach with a qualified ESL teacher, but ultimately, they take responsibility for the class themselves with some ongoing observation, mentoring and feedback. This volunteering structure is an exercise in the promotion of tolerance, and provides the opportunity for those interested in the plight of refugees to make a valuable contribution as well as providing large numbers of ESL learners with the opportunity to learn English in small groups. As the Executive Director of the organisation explains,

‘I think this is one of the most satisfying and genuine volunteering opportunities out there, because you’re not just filing papers or doing grunt work but are actually teaching... volunteer teachers and the learners can have very separate worlds and I think that’s a big piece of how we integrate people.’

This English language centre is connected also with the school system, providing parents with the language, knowledge and tools to engage with the school system.

Recommendation 5

There is a need for a greater number of government-supported, community-based initiatives to promote the education and active involvement of refugees in Australian urban centres. Refugee populations are often settled within disadvantaged urban areas and accordingly can become affiliated with and/or conflated into other disadvantaged youth groups. There is scope to suggest that alternative public and/or subsidised housing solutions be considered (see page 16).

The wider mobilisation of volunteers is significant to this end. Residents often invest in assisting the youth of their own community, and this investment should be utilised through the provision of forums and programs across Australia where volunteers can get involved. In the current political environment, large numbers of people are motivated and desirous of assisting refugees in some small way and positively affecting the lives of displaced people. This groundswell should be targeted through effective programs established to assist in integration, language acquisition and a deeper understanding of services, such as the school system.

In Salt Lake, too, a new housing complex has been built as another means to combat disengagement and antisocial activities in poor socio-economic areas, such as gang membership and extremism. This multi-income property of 136 units includes nine regular, market-rate units for rent. Ten are then rented to youth ageing out of foster care and they contribute 30% of their income in rent. The majority of units are rented to refugee families. This multi-income approach is intended to prevent the formation of 'ghetto'-like public housing, with cultural events and activities intended to create a sense of community. What is unique is the provision of all core services for residents on site. The community centre is at the heart of the site and contains a computer lab open to all residents to do homework and keep connected, an exercise room and a teen 'hangout' area with table football and magazines. Moreover, upstairs are offices for supportive services; property management, a service coordinator for, inter alia, ESL and after-school activities, as well as quarterly health-fairs and mobile dental clinics on site.

In terms of English language and homework assistance, there is an hour and a half of homework and tutoring support provided for youth every day in the main classroom. Depending on class sizes, adult programs are held in smaller upstairs conference rooms. Youth programs utilise volunteers from the university, as well as county-funded staff, to run leadership and resiliency programs and homework support for youth 5-12 and 12-18 respectively. These focus on building life skills such as goal setting, decision making and conflict resolution. The site has also incorporated innovative cross-curricula programs such as the Baseball Hall of Fame Program for youth 9-12, which teaches the common core standards of English, Maths and Science through baseball-related activities. The unit concludes with a visit to a baseball game and meeting with players, thereby engaging students with learning and with an aspect of American culture. These programs have reportedly been very successful, with an average of 40 students aged 9-12 participating each day. The Prevention Services Co-ordinator of the site believes that of the 200 resident children under 18, all are involved in some capacity with the community – whether through after school programs, or organised or organic activities such as hip-hop and soccer. She continued that, 'parents love [living here]. Every Friday night we have parents' nights...we do a meal and an activity with the family. We definitely have the best participation here at Bud Bailey and the residents really seem to enjoy living here.'

In Toronto, too, the YMCA initiates community-outreach programs in order to combat disengagement and isolation. In the early 2000s, for example, the YMCA of Greater Toronto identified that whilst there was a large number of youth new to Canada, there weren't many programs outside of the school system addressing their needs, promoting feelings of belonging and friendship as well as developing leadership skills. The Newcomer Youth Leadership Development Program operates as an after-school program once a week in high immigrant demographic communities, focusing on settlement and integration issues, leadership and community engagement.

Toronto's Community Houses, too, have developed programs that focus on assisting refugees to *settle*, to *thrive* in their community, and ultimately, for some to *lead* their communities. Community-based programs centred on developing leaders from within communities are essential. In interview, Dr Michaela Hynie – cultural psychologist at York University, Toronto – emphasised the importance of fostering links with leaders and skilled members of 'ethnic' community, who can then disperse knowledge. She questioned the fear of 'ethnic enclaves' replete with migrants who do not speak English – 'If you arrive when you are forty, it will take you ten years to be

fluent in English’. Rather, she stated that ‘social capital does mean you need connections to the community, but not that every community member must be directly connected.’

Recommendation 6

Community-based programs centred on developing leaders from within migrant and refugee communities are essential. This helps to bridge gaps in understanding and cultural differences as well as allow individuals to remain connected to their heritage. Ultimately, fostering strong links between communities will benefit refugee youth and bridge their experiences within two differing cultures. It must be acknowledged that the act of migration – including the arrival of refugees – changes the demography of the nation. Australia has changed over time and accordingly, services and social/educational perspectives must be adapted to the needs of these new Australians. Institutional adaptation is essential; if there is no institutional flexibility, there can be no adequate addressing of shifting needs.

Specialist Programs

One director of Refugee Services in Salt Lake reiterated that institutional inflexibility and funding restraints were detrimental to programs supporting refugees. The dismantling of a comprehensive language academy saw the emergence of a gap in language and learning needs, particularly for refugee and refugee-like students with limited schooling, interrupted learning, and/or no English. Since 2013, this gap has been addressed in one school district through the establishment of a centre providing a two week-orientation program for students (K-12) with no or next-to-no English. This centre has developed its own distinct curriculum following a theme for each of the nine teaching days, ranging from ‘My Family’, ‘School Items’ to ‘Parts of the Body’. One teacher at the centre emphasised that her core goal was to make each student feel comfortable at school;

If they know the letter sounds and can recognise the Roman letters then I feel it’s been successful; they don’t all understand how the toilet functions when they arrive, that you can put the paper in there; knowing to raise their hand before they speak; survival English like, “I don’t feel well, can I call my mum?”

This program is unique in Utah and recognises the need for additional support for low-level students before entry into high schools. The teacher emphasised that feedback from mainstream teachers and administrative staff had been very positive, with the latter appreciative that a lot of the enrolment and intake tasks are addressed and completed in the initial two weeks. Research into the program shows that it is achieving its goals and as a result the district has invested in the program by providing it with a full-time teacher.

Recommendation 7

The mainstream education system needs systemic/institutional support if it is to successfully deliver an effective ESL program that addresses language and learning needs. In Australia, Intensive English Centres and equivalents are invaluable in the provision of language and cultural knowledge to newly arrived students, as well as in providing a forum for targeted assessment of special needs and delivery of assistance. Increased collaboration with mainstream schools will be beneficial, both through information exchange as well as professional knowledge sharing. Such practices will ensure that teaching practice, knowledge about individual students and effective learning plans and strategies, as well as understandings about refugee and refugee-like students more generally, occur from student arrival to mainstream schooling and beyond.

In January 2015, a Toronto school board began an ESL program within a host high school especially for students aged 17 and over who enter the school mid-year. The program claims to

have a curriculum focus on students with limited or interrupted learning. However, one teacher emphasised that the purpose of the program – rather than to bridge gaps in learning – was to accommodate school. The class is for ‘students who may come in the middle of the year or semester to schools that may not have the best placement for them, whereas if they come here they may be able to get some credits.’ Regardless of their date of arrival or English proficiency, all students then enter mainstream schooling at the start of the school year in September.

The curriculum of this program holds potential for addressing the dilemma of older refugee students with interrupted learning ageing out of the school system or being unable to function (in English) within age-appropriate classes; ‘In the morning we’re learning concepts through English. Then in the afternoon, they have an actual ESL class for two periods where they learning how English works, English grammar and those things.’ However, in practice this is not the function or reality of the school. There are only two students currently enrolled and they are from the host school. Moreover, the teacher stated that he did not pass on any specific information about the students in terms of competencies to the future high school; ‘we’re still trying to work out how we may share some of this information but we don’t have anything concrete yet.’

Recommendation 8

A targeted program for near school leavers to address the specific needs of interrupted learning is an important initiative. The needs of newly arrived students with interrupted learning must be addressed in some capacity, such as through targeted support or ‘catch-up’ programs. However, satisfactory programs have not been developed and disseminated in Australia, Toronto or Salt Lake City and thus, this is an educational gap that needs to be addressed. It is not best practice to have refugee children transferred to mainstream without ongoing individual and group intensive support. Refugee education across the curriculum needs to be adopted in all schools, perhaps overseen by a teacher liaison with this defined role.

Gaps in Curriculum

Teachers in Toronto and Salt Lake emphasised that their respective curriculums failed to sufficiently address the needs of refugee and refugee-like students. One of these gaps was the failure to address interrupted education as an impediment to further learning. As one ESL teacher explained; ‘There’s nothing in the curriculum that speaks to interrupted learning, the fact that some students haven’t been to school for three years – that’s why your friend who is the same age as you is in another class.’ Another spoke of a failure to differentiate between interrupted learning, and special needs;

A lot of refugee students have gaps in their learning... They’re directed down the special needs path and identified as students with learning challenges... We’re putting them in “Special Education” programs because we don’t have programs for interrupted learning.

There was little consensus amongst those interviewed about age-appropriate placement for refugee students with limited literacy – whether to be placed in age- or ability-appropriate classes, how long to remain in ESL-centred classes and the appropriateness of mainstreaming. Many, however, spoke with concern about the failure to expose mainstream students to refugee experiences and interrupted learning. Several pointed to the bullying they had witnessed of students who were not placed in age-appropriate year groups.

Australian Intensive English Centres attempt to address this learning gap through the streaming of students according to English and Maths ability. However, students must ultimately transition

to mainstream classes – again, common practice is to place those with interrupted learning in age-inappropriate classes.

In 2014 Dr Hynie – in partnership with YMCA – conducted an impact study into refugee arrivals with interrupted learning or, alternatively, with education in their home country that is devalued upon arrival. A YMCA representative emphasised ‘one of the findings with government assisted refugees in particular is that there is a severe gap for people who come to Canada and are not eligible for the school systems, although they may be the most successful if they are given the tools.’ Although Adult High Schools in Toronto give the opportunity for some young people to achieve an Ontario high school diploma, the study called for greater provision of services and supports adapted to the needs of refugees given their diverse needs and experiences – ‘Refugees didn’t bring their diploma with them or have lived their lives in a refugee camp.’ However, the representative continued that the study had pointed to ‘an excellent opportunity to leverage a young group looking for answers’, and who would ultimately contribute to the workforce for years to come.

Recommendation 9

Consistent with Recommendation 8, school-wide curriculum must be re-examined by policy makers and educators to develop approaches to refugee education that take into account the special needs of these students. Australian schools must ensure that refugee students are provided with sufficient tools to transfer their knowledge or, alternatively, to gain the skills they missed out on prior to arrival in their host country. Failing to do so will create difficulties for learner and teacher, and may also compound the refugee’s feeling of being educationally devalued. This recommendation is intended to maximise opportunity for success within refugee education programs.

Teacher Professional Development

There is a gap in the understanding and accommodation of ESL needs within mainstream high schools. In Utah, much of the initial teaching and transitioning of refugee students is done within ESL-specific classrooms, forming a ‘school within a [mainstream] school’. Some ESL teachers claimed other staff placed pressure on them to hold these students in specialist language classes for longer, rather than ‘mainstreaming’ them. One ESL teacher claimed low-language learners were labelled by ‘mainstream’ teachers as ‘*your* students, as if they’re not in the same enrolment status’, and felt that such an attitude reinforced divisions within the school community and fostered a differential sense of belonging.

Several teachers linked teacher attitude to changes in education policy and standardised testing, resulting in greater teacher accountability and consequence for student performance and testing. In the United States, ESL students who have been in the country for a year must participate along with mainstream students in standardised tests that are graded against national benchmarks. Accordingly, their scores impact on schools and teacher ratings (Kohn 2000). One teacher in Salt Lake City elaborated:

Ironically national testing doesn’t affect students, it affects schools and teachers. Teachers are judged if their students don’t do well, they’re punished because of the population they test. We do have the [ESL] access test and we use that for our purposes, but the measurable progression students make on that test isn’t taken into account in national testing. Essentially, you have to be at a fairly high [English] level before we can even really see your improvement [on the national

test] – if you can't even understand the prompt, then the test doesn't test what our students know.

McNeil voiced these concerns by highlighting that standardised testing was discriminatory, widening the gap between privileged students and 'students who have historically scored low on standardized assessments.' She emphasised too that standardised testing and curriculum has 'legitimated "accountability" as the presiding metaphor in shifting the power relations governing public education.' (2000: 3-4).

Staff members voiced the concern that teachers were moving away from lower performing and/or high needs schools due to the increased pressure on them to demonstrate student results against key performance indicators. A results-driven approach to teacher performance, pay and/or promotion, is unlikely to foster positive pedagogy for low performers. One administrative staff member in a Salt Lake school queried whether the high turnover in staff was related to the high number of "low achieving" ESL students at her school.

We have had 50% turnover in the last three years. I don't know how much that is related to the additional challenges of working with the South Salt Lake population because our assessment results have gone down significantly and assessment results are going to start playing a role in teacher evaluation.

She continued that high staff turnover meant the school was experiencing a gap in institutional knowledge regarding refugee issues; 'As the school trains one group of teachers to accommodate and facilitate refugee learners within the classroom, there's a turnover.' This reflection is significant to the Australian context given the increase focus placed upon results and national testing. The NAPLAN test, for example, allows schools and teachers to be ranked according to student performance. If teacher pay was also to be determined upon student performance and/or improvement – as has been mooted in the past – this would discriminate against high-need, lower performing students and schools.

Recommendation 10

Currently, there are ongoing curriculum debates in Australia surrounding teacher specialisation and training in ESL, as well as the provision of resources within Australian schools (See, for example, NSW ESL and Refugee Education Working Party 2013). The neoliberal political environment has seen state governments withdraw resources from the state school system, whilst obligations are simultaneously placed on schools by federal departments in the form of standardised testing. School rankings and the measuring of literacy and numeracy levels via NAPLAN needs to reconsider the '(in)visibility' of high needs students – such as refugees – within the established model. Accurate benchmarking of special needs and ESL students cannot purely be addressed by a standardised test – there must be a moderated and modified form of benchmarking.

Another concern raised by staff in Toronto and Salt Lake City was the inadequate representation of refugee perspectives and needs within staff and planning meetings. One classroom teacher in Toronto emphasised the need for greater professional development in order to build a greater awareness in the school community around refugee students and families, and their needs. She emphasised that there are a lot of teachers looking to empower their refugee students, '...who wholeheartedly believe in social justice and want to improve their professional practice to access more students.' However, school systems fail to sufficiently address – via professional

development – teacher education surrounding the needs of refugee students. One Toronto settlement worker emphasised that there was not a lot of specific professional development with teachers about refugee need; ‘we do basic “these are the needs of newcomers that are not being met” and those kinds of educational and informative pieces for the staff and admin...’ but emphasised that ‘We’re there as a partner with the schools so we can’t be seen to be stepping on toes.’

Refugee students must be recognised as an under-served population within schools and the communities at large, thereby allowing for the development of programs that are more specific to their needs. Social and emotional needs of students have a direct impact on their learning (Block et al. 2014); refugee students arriving with a vast array of experiences need to have these unpacked before they can hope to be on a similar footing to other learners in the classroom . As expressed by one Salt Lake City teacher, ‘we are judging [refugee’s] academic development as if they had nothing else to worry about... If they are not at social and emotion equilibrium, how can they be expected to learn as well as someone who is?’ Thus, just as individual learning plans are increasingly employed for students with learning exceptionalities, those students with refugee and refugee-like experiences must have their unique needs addressed in a similar manner.

Recommendation 11

Australia resettles 6,500 refugees annually, including adolescent aged refugees who enter the school system. Moreover, the commitment to accept 12,000 Syrian refugees from the end of this year will result in a greater influx of high need students into the education system. It is imperative that professional development around the refugee experience, as well as the process of recognising and supporting those with, inter alia, interrupted learning and the experience or witnessing of death, war and torture, be conveyed to teachers. With the rise in refugee numbers over time and the expansion of settlement communities, this is no longer an issue confined to schools within ‘ethnic enclaves’. It is relevant to all teaching professionals and accordingly refugee needs must be addressed in teacher education in a similar way to the recent emergence of stand-alone professional development about LGBTQ rights. In this way, too, will there be greater consideration of the refugee experience and refugee needs in curriculum and program development meetings, and similar. This approach will require an acceleration of established reception and orientation strategies.

An ESL teacher in Toronto highlighted the need for greater accommodation of refugee needs within curriculum and teaching approaches. She acknowledged improvement in the development of individual learning plans for students with learning exceptionalities, but felt this should be applied too to those arriving with cultural challenges. She continued;

We need to empower [refugees] for their resiliency, but also to unpack what their individual experience has been to understand how that is going to affect that student and their learning. If it’s a student who has been raped, she’s going to learn differently to the student who saw their parents beaten in front of them or their sibling kidnapped. Each of those experiences will affect their learning on a daily basis. They won’t all learn the same way.

One Toronto Teacher Liaison Officer highlighted the need for greater student empowerment within schools and enhanced valuing of their prior experiences. ‘I am yet to hear a story where people feel fantastic landing in one of these countries and being “ethnic” or a Muslim or being able to speak another language.’ In one Salt Lake school, a large and relatively segregated ESL

population has been included in school activities through a student-initiated 'Culture Club'. This club was formed with the intention of celebrating cultural diversity, as a place of cross-cultural exchange and the basis for friendships amongst refugee students and the wider student body. One teacher suggests this reflects the desire for the school community to be more culturally integrated, and for language learners to be participatory in the activities of the school.

Recommendation 12

The diversity of school populations should be embraced through student and/or staff initiatives. However, these initiatives could be fostered further through funding for cultural events and/or governmental programs. Dates from the 'cultural calendar' and 'Refugee Week' events can be given greater emphasis across the school system whereby success stories might be celebrated and valued. This is an important means of fostering an inclusive and accepting environment for all. Importantly, cultural diversity and the refugee experience should be addressed within the curriculum through the inclusion of refugee perspectives and cross-curricula texts.

Conclusion

School and community-based initiatives to assist refugee students to integrate and connect with their host communities were effective in Salt Lake City and Toronto, if disjointed.

In all areas, there were challenges relating to funding as well as accountability in terms of measured effectiveness of a program. The dismembering or downsizing of effective programs due to cost restrictions speaks to the reality that funded programs must be seen to be invaluable, as well as be effective. The importance of targeted language programs can be seen in the re-introduction of an intensive language program in Salt Lake, complementing the proven successes of the Australian, state-based intensive English programs. Such programs similarly reflect a growing awareness of the need for distinct educational and social assistance for refugees.

In short, this research found that best practice can only be developed if informed by:

- enhanced curriculum design and development at classroom and school level
- stronger longitudinal association between the refugee learner and their pathway through the education system
- higher order, curriculum-centred research projects, focusing on the unique needs of the refugee within a mainstream educational context

Importantly, interrupted learning, psychological and sociological trauma and the complexities of competing cultural diversification are unique experiences of refugee students and need to be addressed discretely.

Recommendations:

1. Continued and ongoing case management for adolescent refugee students.
2. Transferral of information re: student migration history, educational background, targeted classroom management strategies and effective teaching and learning approaches (such as a individual learning plan) etc., across the school system.
3. Targeted funding for refugee-specific and ESL programs.
4. After-school programs focused on sport and homework help to assist student access, participation and engagement in the school community.
5. Community-based initiatives to promote the education and active involvement of refugee and disadvantaged youth in Australian urban centres. Utilisation of volunteers to assist in achieving this.
6. Community-based programs centred on developing leaders from within migrant and refugee communities. Greater acknowledgement of the role of bi-lingual community members making links between newly arrived populations and the wider Australian community.
7. ESL support for the mainstream education system. Increased professional collaboration and sharing amongst teachers (and community members) to address the needs of refugee students as individuals.
8. Development of targeted support or 'catch-up' programs for students with interrupted learning.
9. Re-examining of the educational experiences of refugee students. Development of pathways that allows for the transfer of prior knowledge.
10. Making refugee and refugee-like students 'visible' within standardised testing, and/or establishing other means to benchmark their achievement and progression.
11. Professional development re: the refugee experience for all teachers, outlining student experience, the challenges of interrupted learning within the classroom, as well as teaching strategies to promote engagement and improvement. Inclusion of refugee perspectives within curriculum design and development.
12. The elevation of different cultural perspectives within the school and school curriculum through the promotion of 'culture days', perspectives and texts.

Future Initiatives

The dissemination of findings will occur at the level of school and teacher, whole school and multi-school professional development, and engagement with national education bodies and commentators. Initially, it is the intention of the author to role model principles identified within this research on the classroom and school. This will begin in Term 4 2015 and will involve a professional development workshop at the school level. In the new year, these initiatives will be expanded to involve feeder schools, thus creating a network of teachers informed by the findings of this research.

Concurrently, main recommendations will be transmitted to significant professional bodies and publications in the fields of education, migration and refugee settlement. Initial discussions have occurred between the author, schools and representatives of higher education institutions with the objective of introducing the observations and recommendations of this study to targeted teacher education students. Attempts will also be made to alert policy makers at the state and systemic level to the key recommendations of this study. These will also be recast and presented to media outlets and relevant professional bodies, including the Australian Council of TESOL, the Australian Association for the Teaching of English as well as the Teachers' Federation.

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