



List of Acronyms

AMEP – Adult Migrant English Program

AMES – Adult Migrant English Service

CMYI – Centre for Multicultural and Youth Issues

CRC – Convention on the Rights of the Child

DEST – Department of Education, Science and Training

DIMIA – Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs

ESL – English as a Second Language

LLNP – Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program

NAP – New Arrivals Program

PPV – Permanent Protection Visa

PTSD – Post traumatic stress disorder

RCSC – Refugee Claimants Support Centre

SELLEN – South East Local Learning Employment Network

SPP – Special Preparatory Program

TAFE – Training and Further Education

TPV – Temporary Protection Visa

UN – United Nations

UNDHR – UN Declaration of Human Rights

UNHCHR – UN High Commission of Human Rights

Young refugees in Australia and their English language needs

Introduction

Under the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention and the subsequent 1967 Protocol, a refugee is defined as any person who is outside his or her country of nationality and is
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Background

Needs and Challenges

Young refugees have particular needs and face different challenges from other young migrants in Australia. The refugee experience impacts upon every part of the resettlement process; including upon the acquisition of the English language. There has been a marked increase in the number of refugees in Australia who have spent a large part of their life in refugee camps and who, as a result, have had severely disrupted or no formal schooling. According to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), in 2002-2003 there was an overall decrease in the education levels of humanitarian entrants compared to 2001-2002 (DIMIA ndf p 20). Forty-two percent of all entrants assisted had poor to nil reading ability in their own language. Only 27% of all entrants had good to very good reading ability in their own language with 31% not stating their reading ability (DIMIA ndf p20). This increase has also been observed by ESL service providers. One provider estimated that the proportion of new arrivals currently coming through the system, who have had severely disrupted schooling, is the highest it has been in over ten years (CMYI and SELLEN 2004 p29).

The ESL needs of a young person who has not had a background of education, or who is not literate in their first language, are clearly different from those who have had equivalent schooling in their country of origin. Methodology emerging from various case studies of learners with limited first language literacy emphasises the need to focus on the learners' immediate personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, familiar topics and concrete, real world material rather than abstract and decontextualised themes (Chou Allender ndf p10). Moreover, learners who have had limited previous experience of formal education have difficulties managing information input, organising learning material, following verbal and written instructions and processing large chunks of new language (Chou Allender ndf p11).

A substantial number of refugees arriving in Australia are survivors of torture and other traumatic experiences (Chou Allender ndf p12). After having experienced displacement and trauma, they then face the task of having to adapt to a new environment and, in many cases, have to simultaneously acquire a new language. It is the multiplicity of losses and stressors in addition to traumatic experiences at a time of overall change, that creates the complex situation, which constitutes the refugee experience (Ministry of Education NZ 2005 p7). Young refugees are therefore potentially 'at risk' for less than optimal outcomes at school, and might also have specific mental health needs.

Moreover, the years from age 12-25 are a significant period of transition in a young person's life incorporating greater independence and responsibilities at a time of dramatic emotional and physical change (CMYI 2002 p11). For youth with a refugee background the impact of these changes will be even more significant. The challenges and stresses of the transition to adulthood are compounded when a young person is also dealing with settling into a new country and coming to terms with the upheaval and trauma of their

profound disruption before arrival in Australia, including extended periods of discrimination; conflict and human rights abuses in their countries of origin, often followed by a period of uncertain status in a country of asylum

visa status in Australia, need to understand legal terminology. Interpreters are provided for court hearings, but for some young asylum seekers who are anxious about the proceedings, some comprehension of the legal process can help to alleviate their feelings of powerlessness. Words such as “bridging visa”, “application”, “appeal”, “apply”, “accept” and “reject” may be some of the more useful legal vocabulary taught (Chang, pers. Comm. 17/09/2005).

Service Provision

ESL classes available to young refugees depend upon their visa category and their age. DIMIA divides Australia’s humanitarian program into two resettlement categories – offshore and onshore. The offshore program consists of permanent visas (Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program categories), and temporary hum

2004 p15). The ESL NAP is available for a six month period. However students from humanitarian or refugee backgrounds, or who have had interruptions to previous schooling may be permitted to stay for up to a year. Educational jurisdictions in states and territories receive once-only per capita funding for each eligible new arrival student from the Commonwealth government (CMYI & SELLEN 2004 p6). The program aims to introduce students to schooling in Australia and prepare them for the English language demands of mainstream schools. Students over 18 are not eligible to enrol (DEST 2005).

It is essential that refugee youth continue to receive ESL support after their transition into mainstream education in Australian schools (CMYI & SELLEN 2004). ESL students need to simultaneously learn English, learn in English and learn about English in order to successfully participate in informal social interactions as well as more formal and academic contexts. In NSW, ESL education is provided in primary schools, high schools, Intensive English Centres (IECs) and the Intensive English High School (IEHS). ESL programs include intensive and post-intensive English language support to both newly arrived and continuing ESL students from Kindergarten to Year 12. The ESL Targeted Support Program provides specialist ESL teachers, in addition to the school's normal staffing allocation, to primary and high schools which have sufficient numbers of identified ESL students (NSW DEST 2004 p5).

Young refugees who are of post-compulsory school age (16+) or who are over 18 years may be entitled to access ESL programs through the Adult Migrant English Program

for up to one year, depending on the needs and availability of the student, and students must be registered as a job seeker with Centrelink (AMES 2004).

Challenges and gaps in the current system

“When we sit together in class, it is not only English that keeps this group together but also our struggle to become part of society. This can be hard when many are not sure how long they will stay in Australia or when they are going to see their loved ones again” (Fitzroy Learning Network 2002).

According to Coventry et al., services and support for young refugees in Australia should not be completely dependent upon their visa status, as many migrants who have arrived on non-refugee visas (e.g. family reunions) share the refugee experience (Coventry et al. 2003 cited in CMYI &SELLEN p14). Other migrant young people may have had a refugee-like experience of torture and trauma, persecution, violent civil discord, or periods spent in camps or third countries. The families of second-generation young people may also have had this experience.

The NSW Department of Education and Training 2004 document ‘Ethnic Affairs Priority Statement’ details how many students were enrolled in the NAP and AMES. The report outlines the number of resources, training and amount of funding put towards ESL programs in government schools (NSW DE&T 2004). However, it seems that there have been no comprehensive evaluations of ESL programs in Australia. The only such report that was found in the course of this research was a review of Government funded ESL programs catering for newly arrived young refugees. This study was conducted in the City of Greater Dandenong in Victoria by the Centre for Multicultural and Youth Issues (CMYI) and South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN). The report produced: “Pathways and Pitfalls: the Journey of Refugee Young People in and Around the Education System in Greater Dandenong” provides a snapshot of ESL provision in this area (CMYI &SELLEN 2004). One of the report’s major findings was that many young people who are exiting the ESL New Arrivals Program are struggling to cope with mainstream education. Moreover, it was suggested that ESL in mainstream schools, which is designed to carry on the English learning process that is started in the ESL NAP often did not adequately cater for the complex learning needs of newly arrived refugee young people, particularly those who have severely disrupted schooling (CMYI &SELLEN 2004).

The biggest comment or concern raised by service providers in the report, was the limited time that young people were spending at the ELS and Centres in the ESL NAP. This was generally seen as a result of deficiencies in the structure and implementation of the ESL NAP and on the attitudes and expectations of the young people and their families resulting in the premature transition of young people into mainstream schools (CMYI & SELLEN pp25-28). It was found that setting six months as a standard timeframe for NAP creates expectations and pressures about what young people should be able / pressures about what

Conclusions and Recommendations

The report 'Pathways and Pitfalls' identified a general lack of comprehensive data and

References

A Brisbane City Council Community Website

http://www.brisbane-stories.webcentral.com.au/scatteredpeople/03_others/02_facts.htm

Adult Multicultural Education Services 2004 “Literacy and Numeracy”

<http://www.ames.net.au/articleZone.asp?articleZoneID=16>

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2005

http://www.cmyi.net.au/pdf_files/11_definitions.pdf

<http://www.cmyi.net.au/publications/newlyarrived.html>

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<http://www.immi.gov.au/am>

United Nations, 1990 “Convention on the Rights of the Child”
<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

United Nations, 1948 “Declaration of Human Rights”
<http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>

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http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm

All web resources downloaded on October 8th and 9th unless otherwise indicated

