Language and Learning Transitions of New Arrival Youth

Report to the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee and the Adelaide Secondary School of English

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Introduction

Around two thirds of recent arrivals of people from refugee backgrounds were children and young people under the age of 30 (Department of Home Affairs, 2018). A majority of these individuals access school or tertiary education.

Intensive English programs are an important part of the educational provision for refugee and immigrant students. In these settings, children and young people undergo multiple interrelated processes of acculturation and transition: to schooling, to social life in Australia, and to the English language for social and academic communication.

The project reported here investigated the language and learning transition experiences of a group of students from refugee backgrounds who were either currently enrolled in, or recent graduates from, an intensive English school in Adelaide, South Australia.

A team of researchers from the University of South Australia's School of Education undertook this research after being selected as recipients for the Smolicz Award through a tender process. The project was carried out at the direction of, and in consultation with, the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee of South Australia.

The Smolicz Award

The Smolicz Award was established in 2009 to honour the legacy of Professor Jerzy (George) Smolicz AM (1935 – 2006) in the areas of languages and multicultural education. Professor Smolicz was Chair of the former Multicultural Education Committee (MEC) 1985–2005. He was Professor in the Department of Education and Director of the Centre for Intercultural Studies and Multicultural Education (CISME) at the University of Adelaide. He contributed towards government policies through his membership of several committees, including one that produced the report Education for a Cultural Democracy (1984. This report became the blueprint for successive South Australian Governments in the area of multicultural education policy.

Funding for this award was provided by:

- The University of Adelaide
- University of South Australia
- Flinders University of South Australia
- The Department for Education
- Catholic Education of South Australia
- Association of Independent School of South Australia
- The Modern Language Teachers Association of South Australia
- The former Ethnic Schools Board.

The Smolicz family requested the remaining funds in the Award program be expended on a project to support adolescent refugees and new arrivals from emerging communities in South Australia to support their literacy development and their language learning. The family believed such a project would be in keeping with Professor Smolicz's personal experiences and longstanding research investigations.

Project Initial Development

At the request of the Smolicz family, the Multicultural Education and Languages Committee (MELC) worked with the Adelaide Secondary School of English (ASSOE) and the School of Languages to develop a small-scale research project 'Student experiences and perceptions about their literacy development and language(s) practices'.

The Ministerial Advisory Committee: Multicultural Education and Languages (MELC) provides advice to the South Australian Minister for Education on three interrelated areas of education: languages education, multicultural education and the internationalisation of education. The MELC works across the three schooling sectors and its work encompasses the Ethnic and Community Schools Languages (ECLS) Program.

The parameters of the project were set out in the Request for Tender. This document identified the two groups of students who were to be in focus for the project:

> This project is to be undertaken by a research team working with two key groups of recently arrived refugee students; students from Syria and Nepal. These two groups have arrived in Australia for very different reasons and under different circumstances bringing different refugee experiences, and contrasting religious, linguistic and cultural practices. (RQF 2019)

The terms of the brief implied a holistic perspective, assuming that students' experiences of language, culture, and the refugee journey are interrelated and involved in shaping the transition to schooling in Australia.

The research team determined that an approach to students and families based on the project title 'New Arrival Youth Speak' offered an inclusive invitation and did not communicate any implication of comparison between the two groups.

Literature Review

There is a vast literature on linguistic and cultural diversity in relation to schooling in general and language learning in particular. Since much of this literature is well known, we have focused our search and review specifically on educational and language learning experiences of students from refugee backgrounds, in Australia and similar national contexts. Empirical research, yielding findings from analysis of data, whether quantitative or qualitative, was gathered.

A thematic analysis of this literature identified some key issues, which are discussed in the review below, illustrated by selected references. A main finding was that refugee students' educational and language learning experiences cannot be properly understood without consideration of the lives of refugees prior to their arrival in a host country. Secondly, understanding social and cultural transitions, in their diversity, is vital.

Refugee student experiences and outcomes

Studies have investigated multiple aspects of the experiences and outcomes of students from refugee backgrounds. These include psychological adjustment, response to trauma, peer socialisation, family and community support, language learning, adaptation to schooling in the host country, and academic performance. A recurrent theme in these studies is the inter-relatedness of psychological, social and

academic domains at both individual and institutional levels. Reflecting this, Birman & Trickett (2001, p. 456) suggest that acculturation should be conceptualised "multidimensionally, including the constructs of language competence, behavioral acculturation, and cultural identity." With the understanding in mind that these domains are not separate, we will turn to an examination of particular themes from the literature.

Language and literacy challenges

Students whose access to schooling has been interrupted, or who have attended different schools while mobile between countries and schooling systems, face different challenges to their peers. Their knowledge of their L1 may be limited, if they have transited to a country in which this is not the dominant language. They may also have had limited opportunities to learn written literacy in their L1, or in another language. In the case of girls from certain countries, this is because they have not been permitted to attend school.

An Australian study (Miller et al, 2005) focused on Sudanese background high school students, finding they had experienced minimal schooling prior to arrival. This case study project tracked students from their English intensive program into their destination high schools, interviewing the students and their teachers. Once in the mainstream, students were required to learn using textbooks which were at an 'inappropriate level' for their still-developing English literacy and were directed to use dictionaries to assist comprehension, which the students found unhelpful and frustrating (Miller et al 2005, p. 28).

The increasing complexity and subject-specific nature of language demands in higher levels of secondary schools creates significant obstacles to learning (Brown et al, 2006, p. 158). Woods (2009) found that a lack of 'relevant content area texts' suitable for secondary students with developing English literacy limited their opportunities to access curriculum.

An Australian study surveyed 61 secondary teachers to investigate their strategies for supporting refugee students with language and literacy challenges (Windle, 2012). On average, teachers had 4 such students in their classes, but many also had other high-needs students to support. Ascertaining students' prior knowledge and linking this to new knowledge was the most common strategy, used by 87% of educators, followed by teaching core vocabulary (77%). Just under half explicitly taught text types (48%) and around a third gave direct instruction in learning strategies (35%). Two thirds of teachers stated they lacked access to appropriate resources. The researchers concluded that there was greater emphasis on direct teacher support than on enabling students to become self-directed learners and expressed concern that refugee student may be encouraged to rely on teachers for guidance (Windle, 2012). Reliance on teachers may be the preference of students.

Dumenden & English (2013) conducted a case study of former refugee students who had transitioned from English intensive programs to mainstream high schools. The students looked to receive a similar level of support from their class teachers as had been made available in their new arrival programs; this clashed with the teachers' expectations of learner independence.

Another area in which expectations can clash is regarding students working in collaborative groups. While secondary teachers often create opportunities for group work, successful participation relies on students' familiarity with this learning style. Brown et al (2006) report that refugee background students are likely to have experienced schooling in large teacher-directed classes; group work may be an unfamiliar experience.

The provision of supplementary assistance is a common response to the perceived needs of refugee secondary students. This often takes the form of tutoring services to support students' study and assignment completion. Weekes et al (2011) investigated one such service, Classroom Connect, implemented in six Catholic schools in the Western Sydney region. When it commenced in 2008, the service targeted Sudanese students but was subsequently extended to all refugee students identified as needing support and by 2010 was serving 182 students. Schools were free to implement either an in-class or a withdrawal approach or a combination of both, the third option being the most common. Tutors in this study reported that students' difficulties extended beyond written language. Interpreting assignment instructions, managing a wide variety of tasks, undertaking oral language based assessments such as presentations, and coping with the pressure of deadlines were common areas where support was needed. A lack of support at home was often mentioned by students as a reason that tutoring was vital. Students also voiced a preference for withdrawal rather than in-class support.

It should be noted that not all refugee students arrive with low levels of English language and literacy; some have experienced years of schooling in English. Uptin et al's (2013) study of former refugee students in Australian high schools found that competent English speakers were often placed in low stream and remedial classes and had to 'fight to be seen as … competent learner[s]' (2013, p. 134).

Trauma and resilience

It is well understood that experiences of war, dislocation, grief and upheaval create emotional pain and psychological injury. Australian youth with refugee backgrounds experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress than their peers. In the 16 to 25 age group, 31% of males and 37% of females who are former refugees report moderate to high levels of distress, compared to 5% and 12% respectively of their peers (Rioseco & Liddy, 2018). Exposure to violent events is a particular risk factor for former refugee youth, with one study finding significant correlations between such exposure and PTSD, risk-taking and lower school achievement (Berthold, 2000).

One aspect sometimes overlooked is that schooling can be the source of painful experiences, a phenomenon referred to by Baak (2016), as 'hidden injuries'. An interview study of six former refugees. reports that schools attended during refugee periods were characterised by authoritarian, discipline-based teaching. Shockingly, all the students reported 'being 'hit', 'beaten' or 'bashed' by teachers' (Baak, 2016, p. 152).

Resilience in having survived and grown up through very challenging experiences can also be a source of strength for schools to build on. Based on a review of research literature, Miller et al report that deficit views, which highlight students' needs or problems, are increasingly being 'replaced by a focus on resilience' (2017, p. 348).

Recognising impacts of refugee experiences can be an opportunity for learning within school communities, contributing to mutual understanding. Hek (2005) compared two UK secondary schools in terms of their approach to integrating former refugee students. One school integrated refugee studies into the social and health education curriculum; refugee background students at this school felt their experiences were valued and their strengths recognised. Their sense of social inclusion was greater than their peers in the comparison school.

Refugee youth themselves emphasise the importance of strength-based approaches that focus on their goals and aspirations, A recent report of the *National Multicultural Youth Leadership Summit* stated that youth wish to put a 'stop to stories' that fix their identities in their refugee journeys (MYAN 2019, p. 15). Providing avenues for youth to tell their own stories and be heard can promote wellbeing and social inclusion. Geres reports on an initiative in which EAL teachers in Canada incorporated students developing narratives to explore 'places, activities, and values that [had] comforted them in times of overwhelming despair' (2016, p. 81). Students reported feeling a strong sense of attachment to their school and trust in their teachers' care.

Social inclusion for students and families

There is robust research evidence that an educational environment characterised by social inclusion, where there is a value placed on students' sense of belonging, enhances refugee background students' participation. Correa-Velez et al's (2010) study of 97 refugee youth over the first three years following their arrival to Australia found that wellbeing outcomes were strongly associated with 'indicators of belonging' (p. 1399) while social exclusion, bullying and discrimination were negatively associated with wellbeing.

It is often assumed that students' struggles with trauma are a primary reason for poor psychological wellbeing, which downplays the importance of social factors. Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) examined refugee background students' sense of school belonging and found that it was associated with reduced depression and greater self-efficacy. This effect was independent of the degree of adversity students had been exposed to in the past. This suggests that a socially inclusive school environment can mitigate the effects of trauma.

Creating positive inter-cultural relations between students is an important aspect of an inclusive school. However, racism and racial tensions challenge the attainment of this ideal. Findings from an interview study of twelve former refugees in their late teens, found that they faced exclusion based on race (Uptin et al, 2013). They reported being verbally abused and, particularly for males, treated with aggression that spilled into fighting. According to Correa-Velez (op. cit.) a significant minority of students (20%) had experienced negative impacts of racial bullying and discrimination.

A holistic approach to social inclusion by schools can be extended to students' families and communities. Rah et al (2010) interviewed Canadian educators regarding perceived barriers to and enablers of involvement by Hmong refugee parents. Effective practices reported by educators included establishing parent liaison positions and involving service organisations. However, researchers noted that a deficit view of parents as 'deferential' and needing help limited the extent of partnership.

Based on an ethnographic study of learning program for refugee parents that was implemented in two schools, UK based researcher Hope (2011) recommended that educators inquire into families' networks and knowledge resources and involve them in both the design and delivery of learning programs for parents.

Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken to eliciting student perspectives. The methodology combined two elements in an interactive approach maximising student participation: 1) language portraits 2) focus group discussions. Seven focus groups were run across two schools, each facilitated by two members of

the research team. Video and audio recordings were made, and students' language portraits collected. Recordings were transcribed.

Language portraits

Language portraits have been used in research with participants from diverse language backgrounds, and particularly when their L1 is other than the dominant language (Lau, 2016; Prasad, 2014). It is a visual method in which coloured markers or pencils are used to represent languages spoken or understood by the participant, these being mapped onto an outline of a human body. For this project, we designed an expanded version of the language portrait to learn more about students' language experiences across contexts. The portrait has five segments representing the school, home, person, online domain, and a blank segment which allows the student to add a drawing or text.

The language portraits were completed individually at the start of the focus group session.
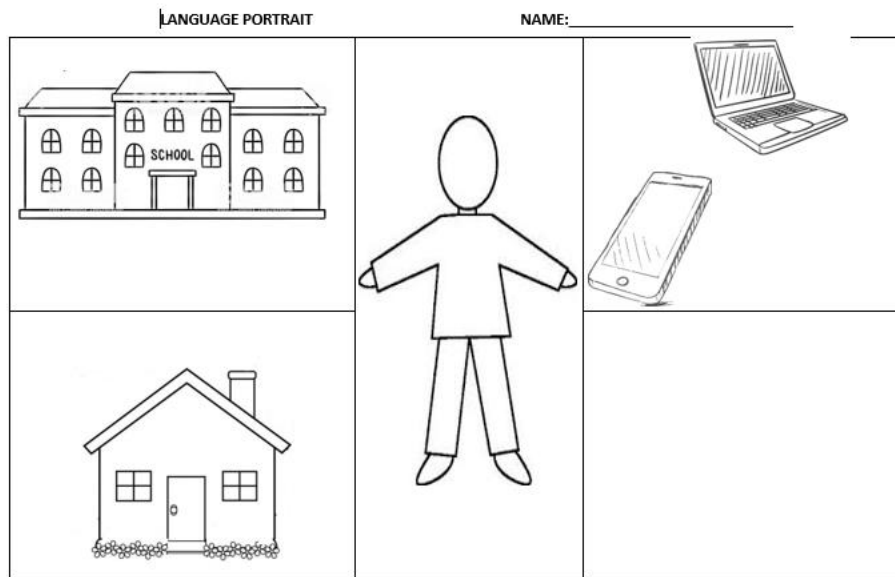
Figure 1: Language portrait

Group discussion

The focus group sessions included two levels of discussion: informal peer-to-peer talk while completing language portraits, often in L1; and structured discussion facilitated by researchers. The structured discussion consisted of:

1) Guided reflection on the language portraits created by the group
2) Scenario elicitations
3) Questions about support

Two scenarios were presented to prompt discussion:
1: You are a teacher or principal and you want to encourage Syrian/Nepalese families to send their children to your school. What could you do to make your school a welcoming environment?

2: There are a lot of assignments due at school. Anni has got behind in his/her work and doesn't know what to do. What are some of the reasons why students might fall behind in their schoolwork and what advice would you give Anni?

Culturally inclusive approach

Student and parent information letters and consent forms were provided in English, Arabic and Nepalese. Consultation with Dr Nadeem Memon of the Centre for Islamic Thought and Education assisted with developing a culturally appropriate approach for Islamic students. Where possible we ran single-sex groups and we also ensured that the image of the human body in the language portrait appeared to be modestly clothed.

Ethics clearance

Ethics approval was sought and gained from the University's Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval to conduct research was also sought and gained from the Department for Education.

Participants

Adelaide Secondary School of English was the primary site for the research and activities there were planned in liaison with principal Ms Anti Macri. The principal of ASSOE provided the research team with the names of current Syrian and Nepali students, those who have recently transitioned, and the graduates' destination schools.

As ASSOE graduates are dispersed across a large number of destination schools, a decision was made to target those schools with the largest number of ASSOE graduate students. The principals of five destination schools were contacted. Approval to recruit was gained from three of these schools; however only two schools had students who responded to the invitation. The cohort consisted of 41 students (table 1) and happened to be balanced for gender and with similar numbers of Syrian and Nepalese student (table 2).

School	Students
ASSOE	24
Salisbury HS	13
Woodville HS	4
Total	41

Table 1: Participant cohort

Syrian	Nepalese	Girls	Boys
17	24	22	19

Table 2: Demographic profile of cohort

Data analysis

Students' language portraits

Students' language use in context was coded and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet. Each students' known home language was coded as L1, and the additional language which appeared most prominently on their portraits was coded as L2. Any additional languages were coded as L3, L4 etc. but without any attempt to quantify their level of significance.

As students frequently coloured in different part of the body shape with different colours, a number of codes were generated to represent this, including *head*, *ears* and *mouth*. Place codes included *school* and *home*. The quartile of the portrait which represented the online domain was coded: *digital screen* and *digital keyboard*.

Associations between language and context codes produced an overall picture whether these contexts were experienced by students as *monolingual* or *multilingual* contexts.

The blank quartile was available for students to draw or write about any other context in which their languages were used. Given that this data was highly varied, analysis was limited to listing these contexts to contribute to a description of the range of contexts of significance to students as language users.

Focus group discussions

For each of the four questions, researchers listened to the focus group recordings and transcribed representative quotations. These were then clustered into themes. Themes included:

- First language maintenance
- Student's multilingual lives
- Differences between prior schooling and Australian schooling
- Challenges to participation and achievement
- Layers of support
- Taking responsibility
- Support for parents
- Acceptance of languages

Findings: Language Portraits

Multilingual contexts

Most students experience both their schools and their homes as multilingual environments.
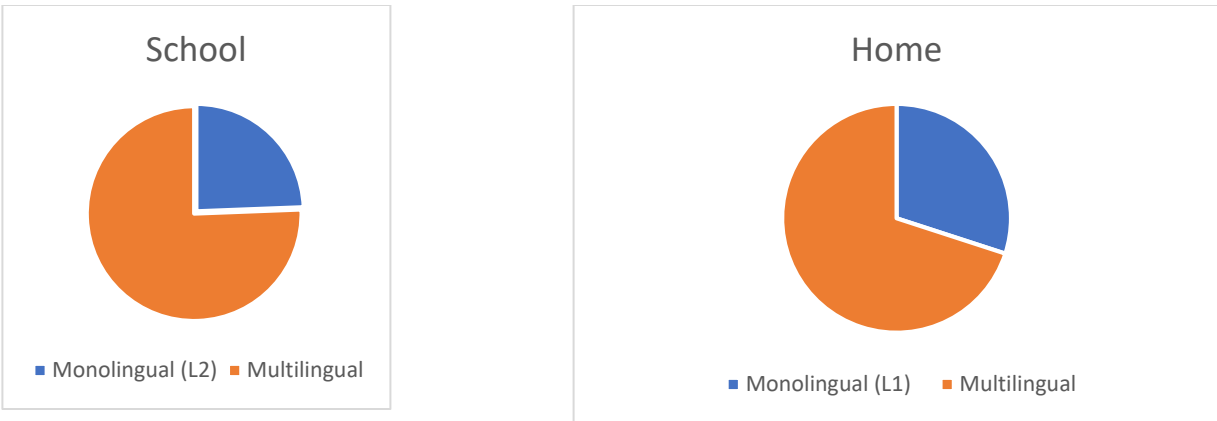
Figure 2: School and home as language contexts

Given the culturally diverse population of their schools, this is perhaps not surprising. However, home contexts also provided students with exposure to languages other than their L1. The discussion provided some insights.

Students' media exposure in home and community contexts keeps them in touch with languages:

> "*I used to watch Korean drama. And I listen to Korean music too.*" (Syrian boy)

> "*I watch Japanese TV shows. Sometimes movies, and sometimes animes.*" (Syrian boy)

Homes are language learning contexts for older family members as well as for school students:

> "*My uncle like he speaks Nepali a lot but then he's learning English like me. Like sometimes we have a conversation in English.*" (Nepalese boy)

Mental, sensory and emotional experiences of languages

Most students experience their thinking as monolingual. This was indicated by the choice to colour in either the top of the head or the whole head in a single colour.
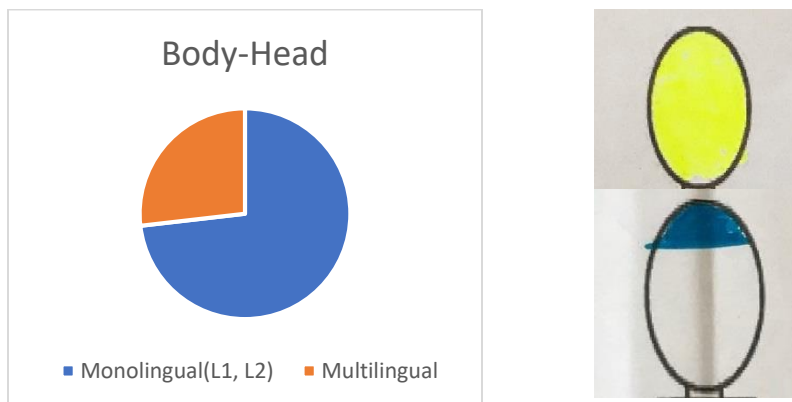
Figure 3: Language coding of head section of body figure

Language use is a multi-sensory activity and multilingual persons may experience their languages through different sensory channels. This was evident from the students' choices to highlight listening (ears), and speaking (mouths) but also physical functions such as touching (hands) and moving (feet) with different colours. The data was too varied to subject to quantitative analysis; however, examples serve to illustrate some of the range of experience.
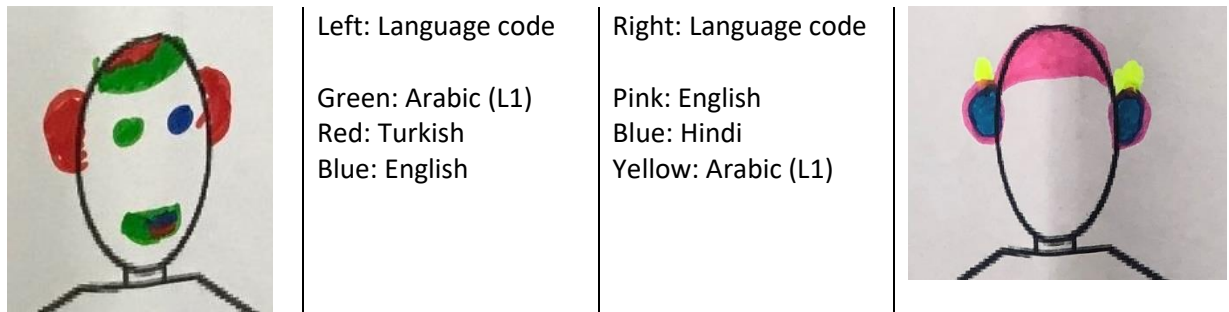

	Left: Language code	Right: Language code
	Green: Arabic (L1) Red: Turkish Blue: English	Pink: English Blue: Hindi Yellow: Arabic (L1)

Figure 4: Examples of multilingual coding of sensory domains

In the example at left, the student experiences thinking primarily in L1 but also to some extent in an additional language, Turkish. The eyes are coloured different colours represented L1 and English, which may be interpreted as indicating that the student reads in both languages. The rather large ears are coded as Turkish indicating the student is hearing Turkish regularly.

In the example at right, the student has coded the brain area to indicate that thinking is experienced in English. However, the ears are coloured primarily in blue (Hindi). Discussion highlighted the popularity of Hindi music for some of the students.

Emotions are often represented symbolically with the heart. Some of the students chose to add a heart to their body shapes.

Figure 5: Symbols of emotional attachment

The heart sometimes represented a primary emotional affiliation with the home language or home country (left). When there were two colours in the heart area, these always represented the L1 and English. The middle image indicates the student has found a place in his heart for English. The student at right has given herself two hearts as if to express an expansion of attachments. It is likely this indicates an affiliation not just with the English language but with her new home, Australia.

Increasing English over time

While this is not a longitudinal study, we can compare the findings from the sub-group of students currently in their English intensive program at ASSOE with the cohort of students who had transitioned to their destination schools. Below are the charts comparing the students' colour coding of their school environments. The blue section represents those that coded their school as monolingual (which means English language exclusive).
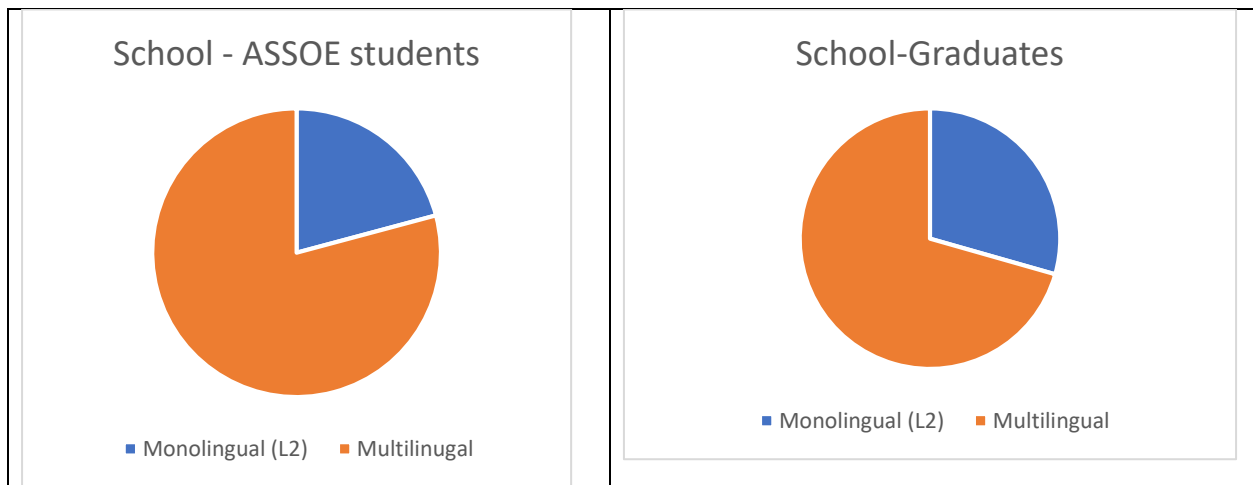
Figure 6: ASSOE students' and graduates' coding of school contexts

There are also suggestions that students are beginning to experience their thinking as more monolingual. Below are the comparative findings for the head section of the body figures.
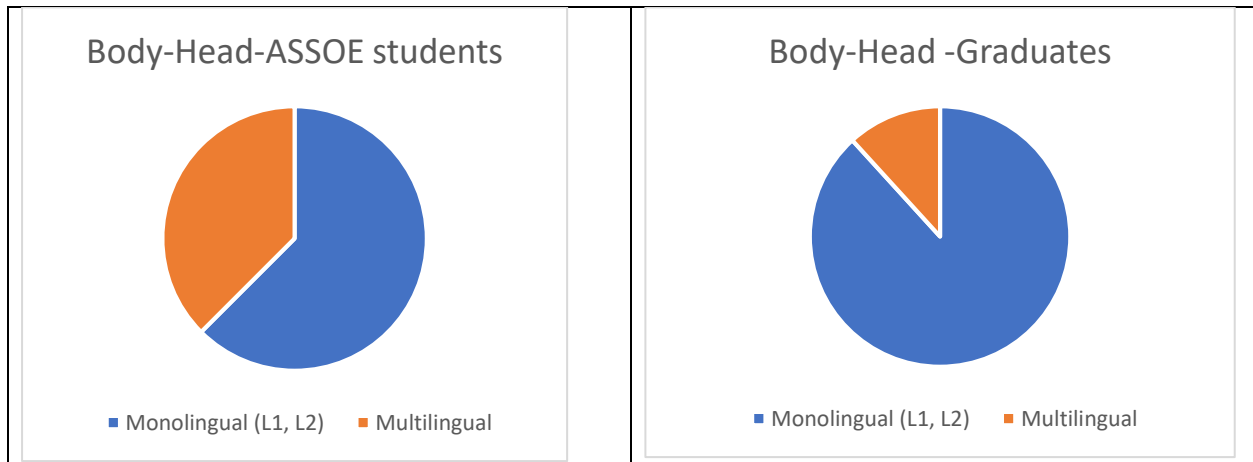
Figure 7: ASSOE students' and graduates' coding of the head domain

We hesitate to put too much weight on these findings or to attribute causation. It is also a matter for debate whether it is an unambiguously positive development, were a student to lose a level of multilingual competence as a result of integration into the mainstream.

Languages through digital devices

Two digital devices were included in the language portrait, a mobile phone and a laptop. In the case of the laptop, many of the students chose to colour the keyboard and the screen differently. Coding of this data indicated that keyboards were experienced as monolingual domains while screens were more likely to be multilingual spaces. Student tended to be using their L2 (English) to type but were accessing materials in their L1 a well as English and sometimes additional languages.

Figure 8: Examples of digital devices coded as multilingual domains

Conversation on this topic indicated that students accessed digital music and movies in their home language and sometimes additional languages. Korean, for instance, appeared owing to its association with the popular K-Pop music scene.

Other domains

The open space was used by 28 students to draw and/or write about other domains in which they used languages. Some of the interpreted the blank space as indicating freedom to use colour without the restriction of language coding. Therefore, we have not attempted to draw specific conclusions about languages in these domains. The drawings do however indicate significant out-of-school contexts within which students were using their languages.

These domains can be categorised as: sport, culture, everyday life, education, and travel. Examples can be seen below.

Figure 9: Examples of drawings in the open field

Five boys drew soccer balls or soccer fields, one depicted gym equipment and another his digital gaming device. We can also see above the inclusion of some L1 text, something which appeared rarely in the language portraits and only in this blank space. Two Nepali students depicted their dance club. Other cultural pursuits represented were singing, music and art. Gathering with friends and/or relatives appeared on four portraits. Everyday life activities included shopping, going to the barber, visiting hospital and using public transport.

Attending Arabic school was depicted by four students, and four (all in the same discussion group) chose to draw the Syrian flag.

International travel was depicted by two students using the symbol of a globe. In both cases words were added to show the languages used in travel.

Findings: Group Discussion

This section presents a summary of major themes arising from the analysis of the focus group discussion. These themes have been grouped into three interrelated topics: language, learning and community. Issues related to language mainly arose in the context of students discussing the language portraits.

First language maintenance

The Syrian and Nepali students had experienced different kinds of language disruption in their refugee journeys. And within these groups, there were differences related to gender and individual preferences.

These differences reinforce the importance of avoiding assumptions, either about a student's L1 or about the degree of significance attached to L1 maintenance by individuals or groups.

A person's languages are an aspect of their identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). For the Syrian students, the importance of Arabic to their identities was made clear by the way in which they introduced themselves to the researcher. Although not requested to state their L1, some of them elected to do so:

> Researcher: Can say your name really clearly, so we know who you are and what your name is.
>
> Student: My name is G-, from Syria, I speak Arabic.
>
> Researcher: Thank you.
>
> Student: My name is K-. I'm from Syria. I speak Arabic. I'm 16 years old.
>
> Student: My name is M-. I'm from Syria. Arabic is my first language, and English is the second.

Clearly, linguistic identity is closely linked to national identity and both are integral to sense of self for these students. The shared language creates a sense of commonality. This was evident as students shared their language portraits. In one Syrian group, students noted that nearly all coloured the head or brain part of the portrait in a single colour for their L1. One boy commented this showed "the way we think". The discussion that followed indicated the various contexts in which they were able to use Arabic:

> Girl: In the home, probably.
>
> Researcher: In the home?
>
> Boy 1: In Syrian community.
>
> Researcher: In the Syrian community you're using Arabic.
>
> Boy 2: Friends.
>
> Researcher: So, in terms of the language that's in your mind, is that Arabic?
>
> Some students nod.
>
> Boy 3: Both.
>
> Researcher: You're sharing your brain space …
>
> Boy 1: We share it, the English is for at school and Arabic in the home.

It is also important consider the contexts within which students had used and developed their L1 in their lives prior to arrival. One of the key differences related to schooling. Students' languages developed in the context of their schooling during their refugee journeys. Not only were they acquiring, or maintaining, a language but they were also learning the language of school, that is, the uses of language in educational interactions. However, not all students had the opportunity to attend school. Some families were not able to afford it:

> In Syria, there are some families that didn't send their children to the school because of the uniform I think, because its expensive. If I'm the principal, free. (Syrian boy)

Gender also impacted on school access particularly for the Syrian girls, some of whom had not attended school until arriving in Australia as adolescents. Therefore, these girls' language development happened in the context of their homes and communities, rather than in relation to academic learning. In these circumstances, their L1 strengths would inevitably be different to those of their male peers.

Nepalese students, while clear about their cultural affiliation with Nepal, appeared to be less bonded to their language. As one group made clear, education in Nepal had shifted to English medium instruction, and this was continued in their schooling in the refugee camps.

> Boy 1: We don't know our language that much because we were kid when we left. I mean but, it's still like we were not that good at using our language.
>
> Girl: In our pre-school there is not like, one lesson only we have Math and Nepali. In every [other] lesson we use English as well.
>
> Boy 2: Yeah because English medium instruction.
>
> Sure: Right so before you came to Australia you were um Nepali was not a big part of your education.
>
> Girl: No.
>
> Researcher: Yep. Why do you think that was?
>
> Girl: Because we live in refugee camp. And the main [inaud] was to English education because we go to different countries.

When it comes to maintenance of their first language, the Nepalese students had different practices and attitudes. Some valued the opportunity to build their L1 competence in community language classes while others were not invested.

> Researcher: So, is it important to you to keep learning that language and keep getting better in it?
>
> Girl 1: Yeah.
>
> Researcher: What about you N-? Do you go to a language school to learn Nepali?
>
> N-: Nah.
>
> Researcher: You don't? Is that cos' you just don't want to?
>
> N-: Yeah.
>
> Researcher: Ok. Do you want to tell me why?
>
> N-: Ah … because I use like English in every time. And in my language like Nepali I don't know like how to write in Nepali. So, I just speak English and write in English.

Another issue affecting Nepalese students' connection to their L1 was its relative scarcity in the online domain which was so important to their peer social lives. This issue came up as students discussed how they had coloured in the online section of their language portraits. It was clear that they were using

English when accessing the internet. Students explained it was natural for them to use English in these contexts because it was stronger than their Nepali, particularly for writing.

Students' multilingual lives

Discussions around the language portraits revealed the rich diversity of students' languages, and the many different connections between language and context in their lives. Many were already bilingual or multilingual before they began learning English. Languages other than their L1 were acquired in school and also out of school through recreation, socialising and work.

Some of the students had studied a language as part of their schooling, prior to arrival in Australia. In the excerpt below, we see one of the students talking about French. The researcher is referring to the way in which the colour for French was used to colour in the eyes, in the head section of the language portrait.

> Researcher: Where have you done French? I can see it in your eyes.
>
> Student: I studied it for three years.
>
> Researcher: Okay. And who do you get to speak that [language] to? Because I can see your house is almost green for Arabic.
>
> Student: Yep.
>
> Researcher: Where do you get to speak French?
>
> Student: I don't speak, I just listen to some music and [inaudible].
>
> Researcher: Do you want to learn some more French?
>
> Student: Yep.

This example indicates that some students are making efforts to maintain languages they may have begun acquiring in their previous schooling. Accessing languages through popular culture and entertainment media could be a way of connecting with languages initially learned formally. More commonly though, students' participation in forms of youth-oriented media were the primary way in which they encountered certain additional languages. An example is highlighted in the transcript below. Again, the researcher is referring to the language portrait.

> Researcher: And tell me about Korean and Indian. I can see you have that for your eyes and your ears, and a little bit in your heart. Why?
>
> Student: I used to watch Korean drama.
>
> Researcher: Oh really?
>
> Student: Yeah and I listen to Korean music too.
>
> Researcher: And when you watch Korean drama, do you have subtitles?
>
> Student: Yeah. Arabic subtitles.
>
> Researcher: And what about the music though, they don't have subtitles for music.

Student: No.

Researcher: So, are you starting to know some words?

Student: Yes.

The eyes, ears, and heart in the portrait symbolise different ways to access, and different relationships with, languages. This student's experience of some of his languages is through media consumption of movies and music. In viewing and listening to this entertaining material he is forming a relationship with the languages in which they are expressed. By placing the languages in his heart, he indicates that that this is in part an emotional relationship. The researcher's question "are you starting to know some words" brings the discussion to the level of vocabulary. However, while the student agrees, the question may miss the full multimodal and affective quality of the language experience.

Even between siblings in one family, individuals may have different language experiences. The case of two Syrian brothers highlights this. They had coloured their language portraits indicating different languages in addition to their shared Arabic and English. Exploring this in the focus group it transpired that one brother enjoyed watching Japanese anime and the other liked Turkish movies and music. The researcher asked whether they shared these interests:

Researcher: Wow, that is very interesting. Do you ever listen to, or watch some of his Japanese?

First brother: Sometimes

Researcher: Sometimes?

First brother: When I get bored, I'll go to his room, and come stay together.

Researcher: Do you like his Turkish?

Second brother: [shakes head]

As each brother had his own digital device, each could access his preferred content. This highlights the way in which networked ICTs may be contributing to more tailored multilingual practices for today's youth.

Learning: Comparing prior experiences with current situation

Threaded through all the discussion, whether informal or in response to researchers' questions, were students' comparisons between their experiences prior to arriving in Australia, and their current situations. Many of these comments directly focused on schooling but even those that were broader had relevance to students' participation in education.

Consistent with Bak's (2016) findings, students experienced authoritarian, and sometimes harsh teaching during their educational experiences while refugees. Students contrasted this with what they saw as a more supportive, personal approach from their Australian teachers:

- Teachers are different [here]. They are very friendly. They love everyone. Helpful. They are very nice. Our Nepalese teachers not friendly. Rude. They hit us. And they beat us. (Nepali students)
- Teachers used to be very strict. [Here] they're kind. They like to be your friends at school. (Syrian boys)

- Here a lot more educated than them. They have different training. (Nepali girl)
- [Here] lots of support, lots of feeling confident. Lots of love. (Syrian boy)

The ability to continue education in conditions conducive to learning meant that students' and their families' aspirations could be revived. In their prior circumstances, students did not feel able to work towards their ideal futures. For some students, political conditions had previously denied them any schooling. Others noted that resources for a modern education had been lacking.

- In Jordan, I didn't have a future, but when I came here, I have many choices, I have a future here, I can go study, go to university. (Syrian boy)
- Well I hadn't education there. I hadn't. I just started here. (Syrian girl)
- In Nepal, we don't have like computers and a gym, that kinds of things. (Nepali girl)

Learning: Challenges to participation and achievement

When invited to consider reasons why a hypothetical student might fall behind in their schoolwork, students expressed that both school and personal factors could play a part. In terms of personal factors that impacted negatively on schoolwork, coping with the effects of trauma was an issue. Also, girls in particular commented on their responsibilities within the home.

- War. Fighting. So they could not focus. (Syrian girl)
- Maybe she has lots of work at home. Like cook. She has to cook for her family. (Nepali girl)

Conflicts with peers and getting into trouble at school were mentioned by boys.

Within the classroom, barriers to achievement were, not surprisingly, difficulties comprehending English language instruction compounded by reluctance to ask teachers for assistance. However, difficulty understanding was also seen as a problem for teachers.

- We did not understand what she's saying. (Nepali boy)
- I think they don't have confidence to ask teachers. (Nepali girl)
- Maybe the person that's teaching them could not understand very well, they need maybe spend some time with the teacher. (Syrian girl)

Learning: Strategies for success

Students valued support from their teachers, families and peers. They described strategies they could use to assist peers who may be experiencing difficulties with schoolwork. This often took the form of supporting peers to approach school personnel.

- Show her how to do and help her to catch up with you. (Syrian boy)
- Go with them and have – help them to talk with teacher. (Nepali girl)
- Also the families when they see us work hard, they come and help us. (Syrian girl)

Some students emphasised that they expected to take responsibility for their own conduct and learning. They saw that peers may not always prioritise schoolwork and in some cases were quite firm about the consequences.

1. Like if she just stand there and she not doing anything, she not going to advance, she not going to do whatever … (Syrian girl)

2. I would say to her, don't be distracted … [by] her friends, her phone. (Syrian girl)
3. He have to use our own time to done the assignment because, like, he's still talking with his friend in lunchtime or recess time so he can use that time to catch up on assignment. (Nepali boy)

Community: Strategies for inclusion

This theme was most evident in response to scenario 1. Students welcomed schools' efforts to connect with their parents, particularly when interpreters could be used. They recognised that their parents' experience of schooling might be very different from their own and they wanted the school to help parents understand both practical and educational aspects of schooling. They also were sensitive to their parents' anxieties about safety and hoped that schools would explicitly reassure parents that the school was a safe and controlled environment.

Imagining themselves as principals, these were some of their recommendations:

- We will say. like: "It's ok we will look after them, this school is taking care of them. So, they are safe there." (Syrian girl)
- [Show them] clean areas like [inaud] at the school is clean. (Syrian girl)
- Show them like our classes, where is [inaud], where is toilet. (Nepali boy)
- They should tell them what their children should improve on. (Syrian boy)

Students recognised teachers' reasons for encouraging English-only conversation in class. However, they were looking for signs of acceptance of their languages, and to see this acceptance extended to their families. Some students were also interested in extending their language awareness to make connection with peers from different cultural backgrounds.

- We will tell the teacher like even if they don't speak any English, it's alright if they speak Arabic (Syrian girl)
- Say welcome or something like that. In Nepali. Like welcome or something. (Nepalese girl)
- Clubs. What I mean by club is like, not just Nepali club but like a language club that like, everyone can learn each other's language. (Nepali boy)

Discussion and Implications

Through this project we have presented the voices of Syrian and Nepali students who have arrived as refugees into Australian society and schooling. The student cohort for this study represents a much larger group of transnationally mobile, resilient youth who are participating in Australian schools. Members of this cohort have experienced many contexts within which they have encountered, developed, and maintained their first and other languages. They have experienced informal and formal education, in sometimes very challenging circumstances, and their knowledge and skills do not always map easily onto a school curriculum.

The language portrait activity, and particularly the dialogue that accompanied it, revealed the contextualised nature of students' language learning. It also showed the constant adaptations students make as they traverse contexts, adjusting their communication between home and school, family and peer group, in person and online. They are navigating this complex terrain during the complex period of adolescence. As Yi has observed:

> [A]dolescent ELLs … are not only searching for a sense of self but are also trying to figure out how they can construct, perform, and display their identities in more than one language. (Yi 2014, p. 161)

The domain of popular culture, which digital devices have made so instantly available, was an important context in which these students could maintain connections with peer culture, both locally and globally. Korean music, Japanese anime, Indian movies and Turkish dramas were all amongst their leisure time consumption and contributed to their multilingual lives.

In these students, we were able to see what has been described as a 'translingual habitus' an orientation to language learning characterised by:

> willingness to negotiate with diversity in social interactions … openness to difference, patience to co-construct meaning, and an acceptance of negotiated outcomes in interactions (Canagarajah 2015, p. 5)

Indeed, this was evident in the way the students participated in the interaction with researchers. We found ourselves to be the recipients of their patience and willingness to persist in reaching understanding despite differences in our knowledge of each other's languages and cultures. We also observed how students co-constructed meaning within their groups. If, as frequently happened, a member more conversant in English spoke for the group, it was clear to see how carefully they checked to see that everyone had an opportunity to be consulted.

The translingual classroom

These students' translingual skills are a resource, not just for school learning, but for managing many tasks in the world outside school. While they accept that English is the medium of instruction, this does not mean that an English-only classroom environment is the most conducive to their learning. Rather, there is evidence from the research literature that a climate of open acceptance of translingual learning can bring students into higher levels of engagement and cogniton (Emert 2013; Fra'nquiz & Salinas 2011; Ntelioglou et al 2014). Allowing peer talk in L1 while undertaking tasks is a positive start and not uncommon. However, the concept of a translingual classroom goes beyond this.

In our experience, educators are very skilled at developing innovative pedagogies. Therefore, we do not offer the following as best practice or an exhaustive list, but simply as some possibilities on which educators will no doubt improve. For those who are already incorporating one or more of these approaches, this study affirms your practice.

The following practice points have been developed based on the research literature and from professional educators who have adopted the translingual classroom model in contexts of high cultural diversity:

- Invite use of additional languages in planning, writing drafts, and consulting sources.

- Include texts by or about multicultural writers.

- Encourage students to reflect on culture, language, and literacy in their assignments and build on these connections to deepen learning for the whole class

- Make translation business-as-usual in class, rather than students' private study practice

- Integrate quality visual and multimodal resources, not as substitutes for written text, but as opportunities for expressing ideas

- Bring students who consider themselves monolingual into the translingual space by facilitating inquiry into how they adapt language to context

- Show that teachers enjoy learning language from students

Closing points

The evidence from this project calls into question a simple view of transition for refugee students coming into Australian schools. We should rather consider the many transitions students have made and continue to make. These transitions involve multiple continuities and disruptions. A school which is supportive of these multiple dynamic transitions might be one which:

Offers a **layered approach to support** which harnesses the resources of educators, student peers, families and community will be well accepted by students.

Incorporates social connection, affirmation for culture and language acceptance, understanding that they are all elements in the **intertwined nature of belonging**. Growing each of these elements and allowing them to reinforce each other will strengthen the network of belonging around each student.

Understands that these **students appreciate the care** and love they experience and are grateful for the opportunity to be at school. While recognising that adjusting to the language and the behavioural norms is not always easy, and some live every day with the burden of trauma, schools never forget that students value education for the future it can help them realise.

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Online resources

https://profmiggs.wordpress.com/teaching-resources/universal-design-in-the-cross-cultural-classroom/

https://www.slideshare.net/chermos/from-multicultural-to-translingual-9635676

https://waesol.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Schulze-Ittner-and-Marquez-Translanguaging-in-the-Multilingual-Classroom.pdf

APPENDIX 1 EXAMPLE OF A LANGUAGE PORTRAIT