

**PATHWAYS TO BELONGING:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF STUDENTS OF
REFUGEE EXPERIENCE MAKING THEIR WAY IN A
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN MAINSTREAM
PRIMARY SCHOOL.**

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CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Declaration	iii
Dedication	iv
Acknowledgements	v
CHAPTER 1 Introduction	1
CHAPTER 2 Literature Review	16
CHAPTER 3 Methodology	51
CHAPTER 4 From the Field	73
CHAPTER 5 Re-Presenting the Data	105
CHAPTER 6 Conclusion	137
Appendices	150
References	167

ABSTRACT

Young primary school age students of refugee experience arrive in Australia, with hope for an improved and settled life complete with new educational opportunities. Resettlement in their new country brings many challenges. Complex processes of acculturation into both broad societal understandings and negotiations of everyday meanings impact on their ability to succeed at school. Previous research indicates that while initial educational immersion in New Arrivals programs can be successful for students the transition to mainstream primary school may be accompanied by barriers to academic achievement and opportunities to connect to the school culture. This ethnographic research is concerned with understanding the pathways to belonging that young, resettled, students of refugee experience in their navigation into and through mainstream primary school. Belonging to the school culture has been identified in the literature as an important route to successful academic achievement for students. This research provides a rich ethnographic account of student life in one school setting. It employs student voice and storying to contribute to an understanding of the importance of belonging in the schooling experience of young students of refugee experience.

Keywords

Acculturation, belonging, culture, equity, ethnographic, identity, inclusion, mainstream, minority group, opportunities, pathways, pedagogies, primary school, practice, refugee, resettlement, transition, storying, structures, students, trust, understandings.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all the brave, displaced children of the world who have been forced to flee their homeland in order to find safety.

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There are some special individuals whom I would like to thank for making this research possible. This thesis would not have existed without the wonderful support, inspiration and encouragement of my supervisor, my husband and my family.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

ANTICIPATIONS, DIRECTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

This thesis begins with a written reflection from a former student of refugee experience (SRE) who now attends university. I call him Mayol¹. I was first introduced to Mayol when he entered a class that I was teaching at the university. I later met with him and asked if I could include his writing in my study. Mayol was keen to have his thoughts included in my thesis. He gave his permission for his reflection to be incorporated as a way of putting forward his views of the place that teachers, schooling and education more broadly, have in the lives of students with refugee experience. He considered it vital that the story of the education of students of refugee experience be told. His story has been included here in its entirety.

My name is Mayol and I was born and raised in Kenya. My cultural background is South Sudanese. Both of my parents are from South Sudan. I came to Australia in 2005 and I have been living in Adelaide ever since. I came with my mother and my siblings. My father did not come to Australia, he lives in South Sudan. I was very excited coming to Australia as a 10 year old, and because I had never been out of Africa. I remember my father telling me that Australia was a land of opportunities. He said “son, unfortunately I won’t be coming to Australia. You, your bothers and your sisters need to look after yourselves, this is a great opportunity for all of you. Australia has a very good education system, you all need to work hard to get a good education” My father never received any formal Education. In fact, before we come to Australia, no one in my family had a degree or a qualification of some sort.

I remember being enrolled in a new arrival programme² in my first year, and I would say that this was the starting point of my education. I never received proper education in Kenya because I was a refugee. The refugee camps did not provide adequate education. I did not know how to speak English, but I was determine [sic] to learn. I struggled communicating with other

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all participants to maintain their anonymity. Further information regarding pseudonym use in this study may be found in Chapter 3.

² New Arrival Programs are now known as Intensive English Language Centres (IELC). Further information on the role of IELCs is available later in this chapter (p. 10) and in Chapter 2. The names of Mayol’s schools have been deleted to maintain anonymity.

students and teachers. It was five months before I could properly engage in conversation. The new arrival programme played an important role in helping me sharpen my English skills as well as other students. The majority of students were immigrants, most of them had just arrived to Australia. They had no English skills.

The programme was implemented excellently as learning was closely monitored for all students and was self-paced. Similar to me, the programme gave all students a good foundation.

In the first year, I learned to speak, read, write, and spell. My skills were improving rapidly however, they were not yet good for participation in normal class. It took a year before my English level was at an acceptable level. I was given my own folder comprised with learning tools. I remember having readings, grammar, spelling and basic maths activity sheets in my folder. These learning tools helped me to further improve my literacy and numeracy skills. A good portion of my class sessions were based on an individual learning plan. This was to ensure that the learnings were thoroughly understood, this meant that teachers could target strength and weaknesses. This was done by going through the folders of students. It enabled them to see where students needed help the most.

Teacher contributions were significant; they provided a lot of support. They were responsible for ensuring that all students received a good foundation for participation in normal classes and more so the wider community, to ensure that students understood the content and to guide students through their learnings. Indeed, their jobs would've been difficult and credit to them for a job well done. In short, the programme was a highlight in my schooling. It gave me a foundation that has permitted me to participate in society. Teachers were to thank for putting so much effort into their work. Their roles were substantial.

Mayol attributed his success in the New Arrivals School to several factors; the dedication of the teachers, the interactions of others who were also learning English and a specific learning plan tailored for him. His experience in the New Arrivals School was a highlight for him. Mayol's story echoes findings from the 'Good Starts' longitudinal study conducted in Australia by Gifford, Correa-Velez & Sampson (2009). This study revealed that people of refugee experience, arrive in their host country with an optimistic outlook and an enthusiasm for obtaining an education that has been previously interrupted or denied. Such optimism is evident in Mayol's story and supported by the findings of Cassity and Gow (2005). The 'Good Starts' study indicated that many students had found the transition from supported Intensive English Learning Centres (IELC) (formerly New Arrival Programme Schools) to mainstream

schools problematic and had experienced some barriers to connecting to the culture of the school. This and additional research has identified several causal factors. These include; inadequate English language skills, trouble negotiating the education system and a decrease in feelings of belonging and safety (Gifford et al., 2009; Miller, 1997, in Pugh, Every & Hattam, 2012). Finding possible solutions to easing the transition of students into mainstream school has been identified as an important issue by researchers (Gifford et al., 2009; Miller, Mitchell, & Brown, 2005; Olliff & Couch, 2005, in Earnest, Houston & Gillieatt, 2007). Furthermore, McBrien (2005) advises that the smooth transition of students of refugee experience into mainstream school is of importance to all concerned with education.

Researcher Perspectives

I am a registered primary school teacher who has taught in South Australian Primary schools for over a period of twenty-five years. During my career, I have developed a keen interest in social justice issues in education and for how they affect the successful education of students in schools. As a previous Lead Teacher in Social Justice³ I initiated and supported programs to assist with more equitable education for all. I consider it a responsibility to promote and support equity in schools.

This research is about belonging. Meanings attached to the concept of belonging are wide and varied. The scope of this research is specifically limited to exploring belonging to school for students of refugee experience. Belonging to school is a social justice issue. A founding assumption of this research is that socially just schooling is built on a sense of relatedness, connection and school membership (Osterman, 2000, p. 325). Yuval-Davis, Kannabirun and Vieten (2006) define belonging as “about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and... about feeling safe” (p. 2). The importance of

³ In my role as Key Teacher in Social Justice is was my school responsibility to support the Social Justice policy aims of the S.A. Education Department at that time. This policy was a Department priority in the 1990s.

developing a sense of belonging to school for students of refugee experience cannot be underestimated. “Establishing a sense of belonging in early resettlement is foundational for well-being” among students of refugee experience (Correa-Velez, Gifford & Barnett, 2010, p. 1399). Kia Keating & Ellis (2007) assert “adjusting to school and gaining a sense of belonging in their school community is an important phase in the overall adjustment of refugee and immigrant young people” (p. 30).

Recently, I met with two former students whom I had previously taught and who are now adults. Both students had been ethnic minority group members in their school community. They had arrived in mainstream primary school after spending time in an IELC. As adults, they reflected upon the struggles that they had faced when arriving in mainstream school and described the move from the IELC to mainstream school as challenging. The students described some of the issues that they had faced in mainstream school. These included a lack of understanding by some educators of their difficulties, problems understanding the school structures and rules, insufficient English language skills to cope with learning in an age appropriate classroom, exclusion practices by some students and adults, racism and difficulties with accessing the curriculum. They commented that they had struggled to develop a sense of belonging to mainstream school. For one of the students this continued into high school and resulted in a premature movement away from the school system. My conversations with my former students, reinforced for me, the importance of this study and my responsibility to be an agent of building social justice in schools.

The remainder of this chapter will attend to matters of contextualising the study as well as outlining its purpose, significance and scope. A brief background to the research will be provided.

Background to the research

Recently my attention has been drawn to the plight of asylum seekers, refugee peoples and dispossessed groups. For people who are seeking a better life for themselves and their families, receiving an education is an important step in any resettlement plan. That this is an equitable education, where all students are provided with opportunities for success, is paramount. A successful and equitable education for students of refugee experience will provide new opportunities for them to form connections with others, to be valued and to belong. Developing a sense of belonging to school is essential for students who have left behind so much of what is familiar to them.

The Importance of Belonging

This current research was conducted with the aim of understanding the pathways to belonging that young, resettled, students of refugee experience navigate when transitioned into mainstream primary school. Developing a sense of belonging with others is a fundamental need sought by all people and one that positively relates in the school setting, with increased student outcomes and healthy social-emotional development (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497; also Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Libbey 2004; McNeely, 2003; Osterman, 2000; Sagor 1996; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Furthermore, the above literature highlights that the importance of belonging to school is true for all students regardless of student age, gender or background. Indicators of belonging, measured in a variety of ways across Health and Education literatures, have shown this trend whether “examining academic performance or involvement with a range of health behaviours, young people who are connected to school, feel that they belong, and that their teachers are supportive and treat them fairly, do better” (Libbey, 2004, p. 282). Sagor (1996) concluded from his

school study, that all students require the provision of “genuine feelings of competence, belonging, usefulness, potency and optimism” (p. 39).

The Refugee Experience

A refugee is identified by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], as “a person who has fled his/her country of nationality (or habitual residence) and who is unable or unwilling to return to that country because of a ‘well-founded’ fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group” (Szente, Hoot & Taylor, 2006, p. 15).

The term ‘student of refugee experience’ has been used in this research, to refer to students who were former refugees who now reside in their country of resettlement. Employing the term acknowledges the important point that having been a refugee represents only a part of a student’s life experience. ‘Refugee’ should not be an identity defining term. From this point on, the term ‘student of refugee experience’ will be expressed as the abbreviation, SRE, for ease of readability.

There are growing numbers of SRE represented in mainstream schools throughout the western world, as a result of globalisation. For example Apple (2011) argues that diasporic populations now constitute a growing population of children within American schools (p. 222, p. 223). In Australia, the number of school age SRE who have arrived in recent years has grown. “In the 10 years from 2002 to 2012, over 40% of the approximately 135,000 people who settled in Australia under the humanitarian stream of the migration program were under the age of 18” (Block, Cross, Riggs & Gibbs, 2014, p. 1337). During this period of time, SRE who arrived in their country of resettlement on Humanitarian Visas have been from a variety of countries including the “Middle East (Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran), Burma, Sri Lanka and a range of African countries

(including Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo)” (DIAC, 2012, in Block et al., 2014, p. 1337). Many young people have experienced “protracted periods of displacement and consequent disruption to education prior to arrival”(Refugee Education Partnership Project, 2007, in Block et al., 2014, p. 1337-1338). School plays an important role for young SRE. It is a place where students may develop relationships with others and form bonds within their new community as well as being a place where they can learn a new language, develop a sense of safety and increase their knowledge (Dagenais, Beyon, & Mathis, 2008, in Woods, 2009, p. 83; also McBrien, 2005).

Young people arrive in their country of resettlement having already experienced degrees of uncertainty, violence, the trauma of loss and feelings of being “cast out” from their home country (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 1399). Resettlement in their new country brings with it hope for a better life, for a safe life with stability and an opportunity to belong (Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p. 1399). As previously cited, the ‘Good Starts’ study (Gifford et al., 2009) revealed that when young people of refugee experience arrive in Australia they possess the potential to do well. However, the many obstacles that they may face in their host country, such as the complex processes of acculturation into both broad societal understandings and negotiations of everyday meanings may impact on their ability to succeed at school.

Many SRE come from a tradition of spoken language, rather than written language and possibly have had few or no educational opportunities due to war and the lack of educational opportunities in refugee camps (Kruizenga, 2010). Acculturation or the process of cultural and psychological change that is experienced by the meeting and integration of two cultures varies between students and may result in varying degrees of tension for them (Milner & Khawaja, 2010). This may impact on their ability to adjust to the culture of the new school environment. Acculturation may result in

changes to the original culture patterns. “More simply, acculturation has been described as the meeting of cultures and the resulting changes” although in practice it induces more changes in one group than the other (Berry, 1997, 2005, in Milner & Khawaja, 2010, p. 23).

Resettled refugees are not a homogenous group and will have different experiences and understandings (Keddie & Niesche, 2012; Rutter, 2006). Many SRE come from cultural traditions incongruent with their host country. They may have been part of collectivist communities, but are now faced with the neo-liberal institution of schooling, based on individualism and competition (Moss, 2006, p. 37).

Kennan, Lloyd, Qayyum & Thompson (2011) as a result of their research in Australia, identified three main phases of resettlement with people of refugee experience. They identified these three phases as “transition, settling in and being settled” (p. 201). The stage that SRE have reached will have an impact on their ability to adjust to the culture of their new school environment.

Mainstream primary schools in host countries may not provide the specific resources, structures and policies targeted at championing the needs of newly arrived students. This may make pathways to belonging to the culture of mainstream school impenetrable for SRE.

Schooling processes

In Australia, SRE like Mayol, may first encounter schooling at an IELC where they are offered additional support. However, many families do not enrol their children in these centres and children may commence their schooling in mainstream school. It is surmised by Block et al. (2014) that the number of students commencing school in their country of resettlement at mainstream school, is “approximately 20% and 15% of

primary and secondary refugee-background students, respectively” (p. 1338). The lack of attendance at IELCs may be due to a variety of reasons, including difficulties with transportation and a lack of understanding by parents of the benefits to be afforded by attendance at these centres. The transition for SRE into mainstream primary school from an IELC, or straight after arrival, has been identified as a significant issue for SRE (Pugh et al., 2012, p. 128).

The schooling experiences of young SRE are influenced by many factors and complications (Kruizenga, 2010). Significantly, Hattam (2006) comments that the experiences that SRE may have at school are largely determined by perceptions represented in the “public culture”(p. 3). Such perceptions can lead to the visualisation of students in mainstream school as ‘problematic’ and as having much to overcome, such as trauma and language deficiencies (Rutter, 2006). Apple (2011), comments that it is important for educators to look at how they might transform education so that students who move from other nations may be viewed as resources and not only as problems (p. 223). This is a vital consideration as success at school of SRE and their emotional well-being have a reciprocal relationship (Matthews, 2008, p. 41; Oikonomidou, 2007). “If schools are to support the education of refugee students, they must take seriously their capacity to socialise, acculturate, accommodate, integrate, involve and care” (Matthews, 2008, p. 41).

The Research Study Site

The research school, Kurlu Park Primary⁴ was situated in a disadvantaged area in metropolitan Adelaide amongst low rental and housing trust accommodation available for families (Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2013). It was a Pre-school to Year 7 school with a Child Parent Centre (CPC) on site. The school had a

⁴ Kurlu Primary School is a pseudonym used in place of the actual name of the school.

diverse population of students with representation of over forty cultural backgrounds. There existed a large representation (sixty five per cent) of students from non-English speaking backgrounds including recently arrived refugees from Africa and Afghanistan. The main groups of students of non- English background were Vietnamese, Aboriginal, Greek and Serbian (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2013). At the time of the study, Indigenous Australian students represented thirteen per cent of the student population. An increasing number of students with minimal or limited literacy skills from various African countries had enrolled at the school in the past three years (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2013). The school did not have an Intensive English Language Centre (IELC) on site.

Due to the large number of students who had non-English backgrounds, the school had made language and literacy programs a school priority. Daily literacy blocks ran across all year levels at the school. Students moved between teachers and classrooms for these blocks, so that intensive instruction at a level relevant for individual students, was available. All additional teaching staff were involved in the literacy blocks. This resulted in smaller groups of students, and provided greater opportunities for individual support. The primary school (Years 3 to 7) also conducted Mathematics ability grouped classes. No additional staff were employed for this programme.

Purpose, Significance and Scope of the Research

This qualitative research aims to describe and understand possible pathways to belonging to mainstream primary school for SRE. It aims to inform policy makers and make contributions to the current literature available on the education of primary school SRE. The term pathways, has been used to describe the negotiations that students make within the school culture as they search for belonging. Students' negotiations are shaped by various interactions and experiences (Pianta, 1999) and

are not defined routes. For as Yuval-Davis (2011) explains, “people can belong in many ways” as belonging is a dynamic, usually multi-layered process not a “reified fixity” (p. 12). Additionally the term ‘pathways’ is not indicative of a single, linear course. Rather, it draws attention to cultural and structural factors and the practices at the school that may limit or foster opportunities for students to form connections (Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011, p. 73). The use of this term draws focus on the ways that SRE exercise agency within mainstream school. The research is framed by the following question:

‘How do students of refugee experience navigate pathways to belonging within their mainstream schooling experience?’

The idea of ‘navigating pathways’ is operationalised in this study by explicating the reciprocal relationships of school culture, structure and practice. Insights into the interactions of these school features and their mutually dynamic relationships are essential for interpreting the daily school life of SRE. Bourdieu’s conceptions of identity, structure and agency (Block, 2013) have had bearings on the theoretical framework of the study. This framework has been constructed around understandings of cultural capital, agency, normative views and power dynamics.

This was a single school, ethnographic study designed to facilitate an in-depth understanding. The primary means of data collection was participant observation. Data gathered from interviews and document analysis was triangulated with data collected from observation. Data were analysed during and after the project’s data collection phase. A social constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998) was employed to grasp understandings and meanings from everyday realities. Additionally the adoption of an interpretivist approach allowed me, as the researcher, to become sensitive to cultural and historical influences in the field (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In this research the term ‘field’ is used to describe the social setting studied. Four volunteer student

participants, who had resettled on humanitarian visas, were recruited for the research. This was not a study based on a particular race or religion and recruited students were from a variety of cultural backgrounds and home countries. Class teachers of the recruited students, and other teachers who worked with the students, were also recruited.

As the researcher, I worked collaboratively with others in one school site and used student voice and storying to responsibly represent students' viewpoints. I aimed to expand educators' understanding and knowledge of belonging to school for young SRE. The use of stories and student voice were crucial elements to the study. They allowed for opportunities for connections and understandings of SRE to be made (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Stories yielded meaningful representations of the findings and provided authenticity to the project by enabling students to be active participants as part of the project, not just as subjects (Pittaway, Bartolomei & Hugman, 2010). As the participants' stories were told, pathways to belonging emerged and obstacles and facilitators were revealed. Member checking and triangulation of the data provided validity of the findings.

Relationship to the Literature

A review of available literature showed a paucity of understandings of how young primary school SRE develop feelings of belonging at mainstream school. Rutter (2006) advocates for more research concerned with the educational experiences of young SRE. She asserts that much previous research has centered on the traumatic experiences of refugee children (Rutter, 2006, p. 5). Christie and Sidhu (2006) comment that there is a lack of published research addressing how SRE fare in the system once admitted into school in Australia (p. 457). Waniganayake (2001) reinforces the importance of using ethnographic research for this study;

“[e]thnographic research involving young refugee children can extend our understanding, and is crucial to addressing transition issues from the child’s perspective” (p. 294). Primary school was selected as a focus area. It is an important stage of schooling on which to focus as for “many children, primary schooling is the first point of entry to the worlds beyond their family” (Toner, 2010, p. 2). A review of the literature revealed the education of primary school SRE to be an under researched area (e.g. Hoot, 2011). It is also an area of schooling with which I am familiar.

There has been little research conducted using the students’ own voices to explain their school experiences of belonging at mainstream school. Kia-Keating & Ellis (2007) emphasise the need for further research that explores attachment, commitment, involvement and belief in one’s school and how this relates to the mental wellbeing of SRE (p. 40). Oikonomidou (2007) found that there is insufficient research using the unique voices and stories of school student of refugee experiences; “Continuous attention to the resourceful ways in which newcomer students struggle to belong to the schools of their host country could provide us with necessary lenses in understanding their experiences” (p. 25).

Attention to how SRE form pathways to belonging during the primary school years is essential, as early schooling experiences may have an influence on students achievement in later schooling (Cooper, Azmita, Chavira & Gullatt, 2002, Marsh, Trautwein, Ludtke, Koller & Baumert, 2005, in Dodds et al., 2010, p. 522). The post settlement experience of SRE is a crucial consideration as there is growing evidence that “the resettlement context can have equal if not greater negative impact on wellbeing as the pre-migration context” for SRE (Porter & Haslam, 2005, in Correa-Velez et al., 2010, p 1400). The potentially negative impact of the resettlement process is also noted by Pernice & Brook (1996). This study aims to be a responsible representation of the educational experiences of SRE in mainstream school. It provides

a collaborative, holistic approach to understanding how pathways to belonging to school culture are constructed for young SRE.

Outline of the thesis

The following outline explains the rationale and logic of the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

This chapter presents an extensive review of the literature around the education of SRE. It raises some significant issues pertinent to understanding the challenges of belonging to school confronting SRE. An outline of the method employed in the review, the themes identified from this and the logic of the chapter are given. The review includes Australian and International literature and has identified a gap.

Chapter 3 Methodology

The research methodology, the research design and the research question that led the study are outlined in this chapter. The theoretical framework that informs the thesis is given. This is followed by an explanation of the methodological logic of the research and the empirical research design. The chapter continues with the project's data collection and data analysis methods. It concludes with a consideration of a number of methodological issues relevant to the research.

Chapter 4 From the Field

This chapter has been written as a narrative discussion. It is a representation of the data collected and aims to describe the experiences of the participants. A description of the students' background is included. When reconstructing the data the researcher has

gone to great lengths to de-identify the students and protect their anonymity by avoiding all reference to their age, year level, religion, name and the name of the school. The stories of four recruited students of refugee experience have been told in his chapter. Additionally a case study of a student constructed from participation observation has been included. All students were classified as humanitarian refugees by the United Nations Refugee Agency.

Chapter 5 Re-Presenting the data

This chapter discusses school belonging for SRE through the categories of school culture, structure and practice. It interweaves the students' voices with the understandings gained from the literature review. The chapter offers some key findings and suggests strategies for assisting belonging at mainstream school for SRE.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis. It discusses the main findings from the study and offers recommendations and potential focus areas for future school practice. The chapter finishes with any possible limitations of the study and some ethnographic reflections. Ideas for further research are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

WHAT THE EXISTING RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT THE SCHOOLING OF SRE

We have a collective responsibility to ensure education plans take into account the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and youth in the world – refugees, internally displaced children, stateless children and children whose right to education has been compromised by war and insecurity. These children are the keys to a secure and sustainable future, and their education matters for us all.

António Guterres, (2015)

This chapter presents a review of the literature in and around the education of SRE. It serves to raise issues identified in the literature that are significant to understanding the challenges confronting students (and their schools) in negotiating pathways to belonging at school. This review of Australian and International literature on the schooling of young SRE has identified a gap.

Significantly, little literature could be located that specifically looked at belonging to school for SRE in mainstream South Australian primary school. Available research in the area of wellbeing, friendships, inclusion and belonging in schools has provided some relevant insights into the social educational experiences of young SRE (see Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Due & Riggs, 2009; Riggs & Due, 2010, 2011). The review includes literature based on studies in Australian secondary schools (see Dooley, 2009; Hones, 2007; Woods, 2009) and internationally (see Rutter, 2001, 2006; Rutter & Stanton, 2001; Sleeter, 2012). Literature that has explored the influence of post migration, socio-political, school experiences and their effect on the schooling of SRE, has drawn attention to the need for further research in this area (Matthews, 2008; Murray, Davidson & Schweitzer, 2008; Waniganayake, 2001).

The method employed in the review of the literature entailed (i) a wide and extensive reading of the relevant literature and (ii) the identification of emergent themes pertaining to the focus of this study. At the same time, reading in and around Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital was pursued (see Chapter 3 for an explication of this process). The identification of emergent themes and the development of a theoretical frame were mutually informing. From this synergy, three major themes, or analytical categories, were identified: structure, culture and practice. These categories were also identified in the fieldwork where structure and culture came together, and were observable in, practices. Figure 2.1 below describes the relationship between structure, culture and practice. The logic of this chapter is structured by these three themes and their related sub-themes.

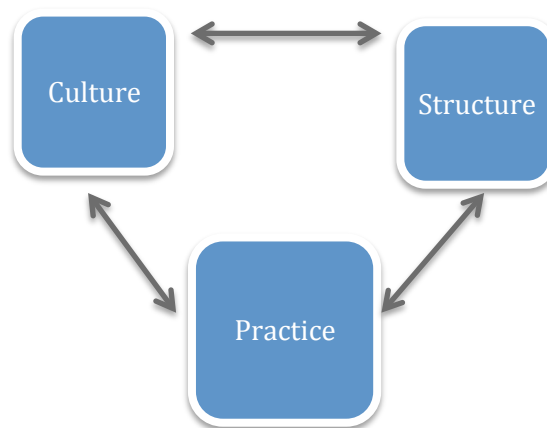


Figure 2.1: The Structure-Practice-Culture Relation

Culture

Wadham, Pudsey and Boyd (2007) describe culture as the “embodied lenses we inherit from the past via which we look at the world” (p. 6). It is more than what might be seen

as 'ethnic culture'. As Wadham and colleagues emphasise, the concept of 'culture' draws attention to the worldviews, ways of knowing and ingrained practices of human collectives. This is an important point to consider. It enables us to appreciate that social institutions, like schools, comprise particular cultures and cultural practices. It is likely then that students who enter mainstream schooling with an understanding and familiarity with its cultural practices are likely to have a more immediate sense of connectedness and belonging than those who do not. There can be little doubt that all new students to a school will experience acculturation stresses. However, as the literature indicates, this will be particularly acute for SRE (Earnest et al., 2007; Milner & Khawaja, 2010). As discussed in Chapter 1, the process of acculturation will be experienced in different ways between individuals and groups of SRE (Kennan et al., 2011; Milner & Khawaja, 2010). Education and culture are intrinsically linked, "education and schooling are two of the most important ways in which we learn to live within and contribute to our own cultural lives" (Wadham et al., 2007, p. 1).

With the need to belong come "questions of identity and the ways in which culture is used to identify and distinguish between groups" (Toner, 2010, p. 50). It is here that Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' is useful in explaining the influence of culture on belonging, where habitus is understood as the "learned set of dispositions by which a person orients to the social world" (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 195). The amassing of cultural knowledge and understandings (which, following Bourdieu, we can describe as 'cultural capital') may result in differences of power and status between groups (Lechte, 2008, p. 69). In this light, cultural capital can be seen as cultural advantage, where those with cultural know-how have enhanced opportunities (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 198). This has major implications for understanding the dynamics of culture in shaping the agency of SRE in their context dependent negotiations of schooling.

The significant themes that emerged from the literature, and that were mutually informed by the theoretical framing, will follow. These are; 'Understanding the Refugee Journey'; 'Knowing the Student of Refugee Experience (SRE)'; 'Promoting a Culture of Belonging'; 'Valuing and Including Parents and Families'; 'Challenging Existing Views' and 'Building on English Language Skills'. Cultural acceptance and understanding are essential for all students including (and possibly even more so) SRE.

Understanding the Refugee Journey

Research conducted by Whiteman (2005) in United Kingdom schools drew attention to the importance of students, educators and others in schools understanding the journey of refugee students. It was found that this understanding might be compromised when basic information about the student and their needs and cultural background was lacking or had not been passed on and that "communication between schools and the various support agencies involved seemed inconsistent" (p. 386). Indeed some researchers in the field have noted that SRE who have entered Australia are, "even more disparate in cultural norms and lifestyle when compared to earlier waves of refugees, such as those from Eastern Europe" (Murray et al., 2008, p. 8). The disparity of cultures for new arrivals sees them facing a loss of identity and puts them under pressure to reconstruct who they are, within a new social context (Colic-Peisker & Walker in Murray, et al., 2008). Other researchers emphasise that the tensions that children and families may experience in their new culture are triggered by significant issues such as housing insecurity, transitioning to school, racist incidents, "language barriers, loss of social identity, finding employment, anxiety about friends and loved ones left behind, lack of mainstream social networks and significant boredom and loneliness" (Lewig, Arney & Salveron, 2009, p. 26). These points, are also made by Lopez-Class, Castro & Ramirez, 2011, and Rutter & Stanton, 2001.

The loss of identity and changes that are experienced by people may compromise or accelerate the acculturation process. Sonderegger and Barrett (2004, in Murray et al., 2008) highlight the variance of degree of acculturation that occurs between people of refugee experience (p. 9). They comment that acculturation varies between individuals, family members and cultural groups. The literature suggests that when SRE transition to mainstream school, acknowledgement of the acculturation issues that students may be facing, will make their transition and immersion a smoother process. Additionally, getting to know students and their lived realities will promote cultural understanding, acceptance and belonging.

Knowing the Student of Refugee Experience (SRE)

The term 'refugee' is a contested term and coloured by images from the media of 'illegal boat people' and 'terrorists'. On this point, Matthews (2008) urges caution when using the term refugee in schools. He insists that it is a "legal and bureaucratic category, which encompasses people from a wide range of national, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial backgrounds, with different experiences of forced migration" (p. 32). This is important to recognise in a school setting where SRE are likely to have a variety of histories, experiences, cultural backgrounds, family relationships and understandings of schooling.

Many SRE arrive in mainstream schools with a limited understanding of English language and of the culture of Western schooling (Cassidy & Gow, 2005, p. 52; also Lewig et al., 2009; Rutter, 2001, 2006; Von Aspern, 2009). Some researchers, including those above, suggest that people who are working with students recognise that recent SRE may have different life stories from many previous communities of people who have resettled in Australia. These students may have experienced civil conflict, violence, rape, family separation, loss, and community breakdown. It is suggested that

alternative education approaches be considered for students who have had such divergent life experiences. Also of concern is to separate the concerns of recent arrivals of refugee experience from other immigrants as this may help to promote equity for SRE (Waniganayake, 2001). Rutter (2006) highlights the importance of educators understanding and acknowledging that the “educational profile” of SRE can change over time (p. 159). With this knowledge and understanding of students, opportunities to actively invite them into the process of ‘culture-making’ within the school can be created.

Gaining knowledge and understanding of SRE is also recommended by Due and Riggs (2010). The results of their research showed that mainstream teachers often did not comprehend the difficulties faced by SRE (p. 35). They advise that teachers spend more time ‘getting to know’ the students who transition into their classes. Apple (2011) with reference to the North American context, comments that when educators are not properly informed about students of refugee experience, they may be left with stereotypes of minority group students, their families and their experiences. He claims that “[e]ffective teaching requires not only that we understand students, their communities, and their histories where they live now, but also that we understand the sum of their experiences” before resettlement and that they be seen as “active agents” (p. 223). This is supported by Kalantzis and Cope (2009) who claim that the “constitution of that individual can only be understood through the subtleties of that individual’s narratives of life experience”(p. 19). As such, it is with increased understanding of students’ life journeys, histories, backgrounds and cultural knowledge (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995) that educators can form an appreciation of the challenges their students may face and take affirmative action for the inclusion of these students (Hale, Snow-Geroni & Morales, 2008, p. 1421).

The literature emphasises that when SRE share their experiences and knowledge with educators and peers the possibilities for mutual understanding and recognition emerge. Due, Riggs & Augoustinos (2014) stress the importance of SRE having opportunities to tell their stories, share their experiences and be “truly heard” (para. 8). They consider that this opportunity is “critically important to ensure that students stay engaged with their education” (para. 8) and it may promote belonging.

Promoting a Culture of Belonging

School belonging can be described as the extent to which “students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school social environment” (Goodenow, 1993, in Shochet, Dadds, Ham & Montague, 2006, p. 170). It includes feelings of being connected and accepted at school, being part of a network of friends and establishing strong student-teacher relationships (Henchy, Cunningham, & Bradley, 2009, p. 2; also Libbey, 2004; Osterman, 2000; Sampson & Gifford, 2010; Xin Ma, 2003). In particular, the development of strong teacher-student relationships was found by Pianta (1999) to be a significant indicator of a successful school experience. Sampson and Gifford (2010) agree and found “important social bridges” and connections to place are built, by the establishment of strong student-teacher relationships (p. 129). This is supported by Xin Ma (2003) whose research found that students were more likely to develop a sense of belonging when effective bonds were created between all school members thereby enabling students to feel safe, cared for and that they were treated fairly (p. 348).

Developing a sense of belonging and finding a ‘sense of membership’ at school is essential for all students (Libbey, 2004; Sagor, 1996) and may be critical for SRE (Hones, 2007). Ehntholt & Yule (2006, in Murray, et al., 2008) state that the establishment of feelings of stability, safety and trust at school, is essential for SRE (p.

21). Belonging to school satisfies the need to be part of a group “a body or a collection of people, a community” (Baak, 2011, p. 25) and is viewed by Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, Westoby, (2003) as critically important for young resettled students. Most importantly, schools can be “the primary institutional context” (Oikonomidou, 2007, p. 16) where SRE are immersed in the dominant culture of their host country and building positive experiences in schools, is essential for “future paths of integration in the host country”(Oikonomidou, 2007, p. 16).

The literature further indicates that a lack of belonging may result in mental and physical illness and behavioural problems (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 511; also Demanet & Van Houtte, 2012; Thapa et al., 2013). A sense of belonging is linked with the ability to cope with stress and it has been found that deficient connections to the social culture may “cause increased levels of anxiety and poor mental health in migrants to Australia” (Sonderegger, Barrett & Creed, 2004, in Milner & Khawaja, 2010, p. 22). Developing a culture of trust and belonging for young SRE in mainstream schools, Sidhu & Taylor (2007) claim, is essential so that young, vulnerable students have opportunities for success. This is supported by Kia-Keating & Ellis (2007) who found that students with a well-established sense of belonging in their school culture saw themselves as competent and that these students possessed greater levels of motivation (p. 30).

SRE may be hindered from creating pathways to belonging by the boundaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’ in mainstream school created by poverty, housing mobility and lack of fluent English (Rutter, 2006, p. 103). Crowley (1999, in Yuval-Davis et al., 2006) considers such boundaries as permeable, but that they require some people to work harder than others (p. 8). The literature suggests that stereotyping, fear of the unknown, lack of empathy, negative views in the media about people of refugee experience (Murray, et al. 2008; Arnot & Pinson, 2005), racism and a general lack of

understanding by mainstream students, may result in decreased cultural capital for SRE. A lack of understanding “perpetuates unequal power relations” (Riggs & Due, 2010, p. 74) and may make belonging problematic for SRE. In mainstream school, the current “overwhelming focus on the individual” (Spencer & Pahl, 2006, p. 16) may result in exclusion practices by Australian-born students where inclusion of SRE may be seen to result in lost opportunities (Silver, 2010). A lack of understanding by others may result in obstacles for SRE to be active agents in their search for belonging in mainstream school culture.

School belonging is important for all students. For SRE, belonging to school may help them to develop a sense of control over their lives after their forced movement to their new country. Resettlement in a new country offers SRE, “not only a safe haven,” but also an opportunity to belong after experiences where “belonging – to family, community and country – is always at risk” (Correa-Velez et al. 2010, p. 1399). Involving parents and their families in their child’s schooling is fundamental to developing belonging to school for students.

Valuing and Including Parents and Families

It is essential for families of SRE to feel that they are valued members of their child’s school community (Woods, 2009, p. 96). Research suggests that schools may provide a place where families may learn “important cultural content that will have currency in current and future life opportunities”(Woods, 2009, p. 96) including the “social norms and traditions of their new country” (Rah, Choi & Nguyen, 2009, p. 364). However, school involvement can be difficult for parents and families of SRE if they encounter personal difficulties when relocating to Australia (King, 2013; Tadesse, 2014). Parents are potentially struggling with many acculturation issues (as explained in Chapter 1)

including the differences between parenting styles that were endorsed in their countries of origins, but that may not be endorsed in Australia (Lewig et al., 2009, p. 7).

Additionally, parents are possibly “unfamiliar with the workings of the education system” and “suspicious of authority and wary of contact with schools” or unable to communicate confidently in English (Rutter, 2001, p. 153). This may make their involvement in their child’s schooling and education difficult for them. Szente et al. (2006) found in their research with parents, that many parents felt inadequate to support their children with homework activities due to their own perceived inadequacies with English language and academic skills. King (2013) also found that limited English language skills of parents constrained “the practical support” that they felt that they could provide to their children especially with homework assistance (p. 271). Misunderstandings of these difficulties may result in the incorrect perception of parents as disinterested and unsupportive of their child’s education. Difficulties encountered by SRE at mainstream school might be attributed to a lack of family interest or involvement in the school community (Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010).

Viewing family difficulties from this perspective can promote a deficit perspective of students and their families and displays a lack of understanding of acculturation and the obstacles that families may be facing. People of refugee experience have much to offer schools and their community. As Olliff and Couch (2005, in Matthews, 2008) emphasise, people of refugee experience have “already shown resilience, resourcefulness and strength” (p. 40). Indeed, it is due to their “independence, not their dependence, that people become refugees in the first place” (Matthews, 2008, p. 40).

The complex lives that many parents of refugee experience face can make attending their child’s school very difficult. Complexities possibly include formally learning English while working and caring for family members, (some who may have chronic

illnesses) and searching for appropriate housing (Szente et al., 2006, p. 19; also Sainsbury & Renzaho, 2011). Therefore, the involvement of parents at school can be limited as a direct result of their lack of opportunities for participation (Szente et al. 2006). Apple (2011) suggests that educators view words such as 'housing' and 'food' as verbs, for both require constant labour and strategic and intelligent action from families of refugee experience (p. 227). "In any resettlement process, access to adequate, affordable housing is an essential first step" and may be a major hurdle in the resettlement process for many people of refugee experience (Forrest, Hermes, Johnston & Poulsen, 2012, p. 188). Further difficulties arise for parents if their authority is compromised at home, by their reliance on their children to aid them, as they search for cultural access to the host society and to develop their language skills (Earnest et al. 2007, Acculturative stress section, para 1). This creates additional barriers for parents as they try to be involved in their child's schooling.

Parents may encounter further difficulties if boundaries within schools reinforce exclusive cultural practices. This is an important consideration, as the research strongly suggests parental school participation "can help to decrease intergenerational stress" in families of refugee experience and provide opportunities for parents to share in the lives and culture of their children (Earnest et al. 2007, Social ecology section, para. 5). Additionally, the literature indicates that the participation of parents and families is a positive indicator of successful schooling for SRE (McBrien, 2005, 2011; Rah, et al., 2009).

Research has shown that participation may be difficult for family members if their voices disappear into the "pre-established structure of power whereby the school sets the standards for parental and community involvement" (Perez, Carreon, Drake & Calabrese, 2005, in Diez, Gatt & Racionero, 2011, p. 186). For the involvement of

parents of refugee experience to be successful in schools, their participation “cannot be approached in the same ways that parent involvement has traditionally been understood and implemented in schools”(Waterman & Harry, 2008 in Tadesse, 2014, p. 304). Participation can be enhanced for parents when some existing views of SRE, and their families, are challenged in mainstream school.

Challenging Existing Views

SRE can be viewed as having something to overcome in mainstream school (García & Guerrad, 2004). Negative beliefs about students’ cultural understandings, learning potentials and negative views of their families, may have lowered expectations in mainstream school for SRE (Garcia & Guerrad, 2004, p. 160; also Sleeter, 2013). This deficit view is in contrast to the belief that “schools have the responsibility to change and adapt to their students, not the other way around” (Brinegar, 2010, p. 3).

Difficulties that SRE face at school may be interpreted as issues of the students themselves (Bryan, 2005; Riggs & Due, 2010; Sleeter, 2013). The students’ perceived deficiencies of language acquisition and past trauma experiences might be blamed for their lack of success in mainstream school (Sidhu & Taylor, 2007, p. 289; also Garcia & Guerrad, 2004).

Rutter (2006 in Pinson & Arnot, 2007,) argues that the trauma discourse that sometimes occurs in schools might result in SRE being seen as “traumatized rather than violated by political and personal oppressions” (p. 402). There is evidence in the literature that children do not respond to trauma in the way that schools expect them to and that by focusing on trauma other socio-political factors are ignored, such as racism, which has a “profound impact on acculturation, well-being and mental health” (Berry, 1997, Rutter, 2006 in Matthews, 2008, p. 39). By focusing on pre-migration

experiences, SRE may be viewed as ‘the other’ (Arnot & Pinson, 2005) and denied opportunities for belonging and full membership in the school culture.

A deficit view of SRE may be further exacerbated when students are viewed to have complex needs and there are inadequate school resources to support these perceived needs (Jones & Rutter, 1998, in Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 43; see also Hughes & Beirens, 2007; Rutter & Stanton, 2001). Needs of students may be categorized as “relating to their unfamiliarity with school routine; problems associated with an unsettled life; traumatic events leading up to or resulting from the recent move and the potential of new surroundings to have a negative impact on school attainment and attendance” (Hughes & Beirens, 2007, p. 264).

When SRE are viewed as students with particular needs, their unique skills and abilities may not be recognized (Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Dooley, 2009). This is an important point to consider as “[r]efugees are resilient people despite their difficult histories: being a refugee is only one aspect of their subjectivity” (Hewson, 2006, in Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010, p. 151). Apple (2011) urges educators to recognise the agency of students from minority groups, including those of refugee experience, and to see students as resources, rather than problems. This recognition is essential as all students bring unique skills and abilities to their educational settings “acquired through years of interaction and practice”, and these skills affect how they think and process information (McCarthy & Vickers, 2008, p. 261). In particular SRE skills may include, “a broad international knowledge, multilingual skills and an awareness of many cultures and communities” as well as resourcefulness, resilience, adaptability, commitment to family and a “strong desire to achieve educationally” (Olliff, 2008, p. 53). Recognition, Pryor (2001, in Murray et al., 2008) states, of the unique contributions SRE can provide within the classroom, is essential for students’ successful experience at school; “[p]erspectives must shift from viewing students as

problems, to understanding what knowledge and experiences students bring to school” (p. 14).

In order to move from a deficit perspective of SRE, and to move to recognition of the skills that students possess, research indicates that educators should reflect upon their own assumptions. These include assumptions about learning and how these influence their teaching (Yorke-Barr, Sommers, Ghore & Montie, 2005; Boske & Benavente-McEnergy, 2010). This is explained by Carrington (2000, in Carrington & Robinson, 2006) who claims that educators may be “unaware of their assumptions, theories or educational beliefs and the implications of these for behaviour and practice” (p. 325). Additionally, the tendency to homogenise refugee student difference (Rutter, 2006) works towards the silencing of individual diversity, identity and experiences (Keddie, 2012, p. 210). This was highlighted in the ‘Good Starts’ study (Gifford et al., 2009), when assumptions were made at school about friendships between students from the same home country. It was assumed that students would want to spend time together as they came from the same country, however, the students’ families had previously been engaged in fighting within the refugee camps. The students did not want to be friends. Transitioning from the same home country did not necessarily result in positive relationships for students. Woods (2009) too sees individual diversity, identity and experience as essential considerations and claims that there is a need to find “new ways to know, and to represent these students” (p. 88).

According to Woods (2009), the normalized Western view of education as a “homogenised, uninterrupted print-based school experience” perpetuates the deficit view of SRE and ignores the knowledge they bring school (p. 90). Boske and Benavente-McEnergy (2010) comment that when SRE are viewed in terms of their needs, the many obstacles within the school community that they will encounter are ignored. This is an important point as a successful schooling experience is part of the

resettlement pathways of SRE, especially those who have had little or no previous schooling experiences (Dooley, 2009; Taylor, 2008).

The literature is clear that deficit models can be negated by critically examining the students' educational environment and the "systematic practices and role definitions" within this (García & Guerrad, 2004, p. 154). Deficit views of refugee students ignore the power imbalances that exist within schools and the difficulties that students may encounter in the culture of the school (Brinegar, 2010; Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Garcia & Guerrad, 2004; Taylor & Richardson, 2005). These difficulties include learning English language skills while actively immersed in the process of culture-making.

Building on English Language Skills

The role of learning English language in schools needs to be understood as an "eminently political phenomenon and must be analysed in the context of the theory of power relations and with an understanding of social and cultural production and reproduction" (Macedo, Dendrinou & Gounari, 2009, in Swadener, Mitakidou, Tressou, & Grant, 2009, p. 4). Language is important for identity because as Freire (1995, in Gounari & Macedo, 2009) states, no "individual or social, cultural, or ethnic groups can start the struggle for self-affirmation without the use of their native language" (p. 44). When SRE move into mainstream school they may not have the necessary English language skills to navigate through their new environment. English may provide a means for self-affirmation for students who are unable to use their native language for this purpose (Swadener et al., 2009). Resettled refugee students may be unfamiliar with schooling processes and often lack the English language skills required to traverse the complex cultural and structural bureaucracies of mainstream schooling (Milner & Khawaja, 2010, p. 22; also Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Earnest, et al. 2007). It is

an enormous challenge to SRE to transition into mainstream school while at the same time learning about a new language and culture (Miller et al., 2005). Hones (2008) comments that for many SRE a lack of previous, formal education in their home country, results in low literacy levels in their first language, making any learning in their new school environment difficult (p. 13). Schooling within Australia is structured around the premise that students are and have been immersed in continuous, “print-based textual engagement” across all subjects (Woods, 2009, p. 89).

Miller et al., (2005) comment that the limits on time spent in an IELC, generally about twelve months in South Australia, (Department of Education and Child Development, 2014) are no longer realistic for current SRE. They suggest that time limits need to be renegotiated around the educational needs of the most recent arrivals. According to Miller et al. (2005) the time spent in IELCs may not provide sufficient development of English language skills for recently arrived students to cope successfully in mainstream school. Woods (2009) emphasises that for full participation of SRE in mainstream school, the acquisition of English literacy skills should be a priority. Students might be grappling with the arduous task of acquiring English in the mainstream classroom so that they can “fit in” and achieve good outcomes (Due & Riggs, 2009, p. 61).

English language skills are important for SRE and may assist in the development of pathways to belonging at school. However, as Matthews (2008) reminds us, it is a mistake to focus only on inadequacies of English language skills at school for SRE as schools are important settlement sites, where SRE can seek safety and security and are not merely English learning centres (p. 42). “They create learning environments and spaces for participation, communication, relationships, friendships, belonging and learning about oneself and others”(Matthews, 2008, p. 42). The important role schools can play in resettlement for SRE, is also emphasised by Block et al. (2014), Cranitch

(2010) and García and Guerra (2004). The ability of SRE to find safety, security and belonging at school may be also be shaped by the prevailing structures of mainstream school.

Structure

Social structures can be seen to both constrain human agency, but also to create it by enabling certain types of activity and behaviours (Sewell, 1992, p. 4). Prominent sociologist Anthony Giddens (1976) defines structure as a process, rather than a fixed state. In Giddens's view social structures exist as memory traces, as the organic basis of human knowledgeability and instantiated in social practices (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). Therefore, the structural properties of social systems are both "medium and outcome of the practices they recursively organise" (Giddens, 1984, p. 25). It can be seen then that structures shape people's practices, but that these practices also in turn shape and reproduce structures. Structures in schools exist in the rules and resources that students draw upon in their daily interactions and practices. Students who have the required knowledge and resources "act by putting into practice their necessarily structured knowledge" (Sewell, 1992, p. 4). In this way structures within schools contain, but are also transformed by, the practices of the strategic agents within schools (Miller, 1994, p. 98).

The literature discusses the importance of acknowledging social structures in schools and the role that they play in "shaping (though not determining) individuals' lives" by influencing individual agency (Block, 2013, p. 128). Structures may be openly inclusive or may exclude (Correa-Velez et al., 2010) and this will affect a student's ability to develop pathways to belonging in mainstream school. Using understandings from Bourdieu, structures can be seen to shape situations that students confront involuntarily and they restrict or enhance the ability of individuals to "to act on,

control and transform” the social worlds around them (Block, 2013, p. 134). Structures are formed from the dominant discourses in schools (e.g. neo-liberalism), they become regimes of ‘truth’ that are “linked in a circular relationship with systems of power which produce and sustain them” (Foucault, 1980, in Moss, 2006, p. 30). Structures make “certain ways of understanding and interpreting the world self-evident and necessary”(Moss, 2006, p. 30).

Identifying the Influence of School Structures

Potential restrictions, caused by the structures within schools, may interfere with the ability of a young SRE to find a “place for themselves in the school environment as it introduces them to mainstream culture” (Dodds, Lawrence, Karantzas, Brooker, Lin Ying Han, Champness & Albert, 2010, p. 522). Restrictions can be created when young students enter mainstream primary school and are unable to slot into the established power/knowledge structures and the broader neo-liberal structures of mainstream Western schooling (Apple, 2009; Matthews, 2008; Sidhu et al., 2011; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007; Sleeter, 2012; Taylor & Richardson, 2005). The current educational structures Cassity and Gow (2005) claim may be unsuccessful for some SRE who are struggling with new “institutional settings” and unrealistic expectations (p. 53). The literature highlights the importance of acknowledging the potential restrictions imposed by school structures in primary school.

In Australia, mainstream school classes are formed from groups of same-age students. SRE are placed in same-age classrooms, despite their potential lack of previous schooling experiences, their difficulties with English language skills and their unfamiliarity with mainstream culture (Murray et al. 2008, p. 14). Class structuring based on age may cause issues for SRE as students of the same age do not necessarily “march in concert across major events of the life course; rather, they vary in pace and

sequencing, and this variation has real consequences for individuals and society” (Hogan, 1981, in Elder, 1995, p. 110). Oliver, Haig and Grote (2009) found that students struggled with mainstream school when promoted according to age, rather than competence. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001, in Brinegar, 2010) described how, for immigrant youth, “classrooms suited for children their age may not meet their learning needs” (p. 5). It was found by Brinegar (2010) that the placement of students in multi-age structures promoted a positive sense of self-worth. Placing SRE in a class based on their age, has been identified by some students, parents and educators as a source of school difficulties and one of the major problems faced by SRE in mainstream school (Dooley, 2009, p. 11).

School structures have the potential of sidelining all that is most familiar to SRE – their language, worldviews and cultural ways of being (Brinegar, 2010; Herz & Johansson, 2012; Kalantzis & Cope, 2009; Keddie & Niesche, 2012). The students’ position in mainstream school makes them highly visible as the “other in our midst” with all other aspects of their being and individuality erased (Bauman, 2004, p. 77). Colic-Peisker (2005) reiterates that this is exacerbated when students are not white, as Australia remains “an imagined community of white people” where non-Europeans are still often perceived as the ‘other’ (p. 632). Acknowledgement of the influence of school structures including policies on the education of SRE is essential for understanding how students navigate pathways to belonging.

Understanding Policies

Policies are powerful influences on what happens in schools. They change both what happens in schools and the role that school members play. This has implications for equity, social justice and subjectivity (Ball, 2015, p. 306). Instructively, Ball sees policy to be both formal written policy (text) and the way that it is enacted (discourse).

Policies, both written and enacted, are formed and produced by the taken-for granted knowledge and assumptions about schooling and education that are seen as truths (Ball, 2015, p. 311).

An influential written policy that informs schooling processes in Australia is the 'Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians' (2008). This claims the creation of a socially just and quality education for all students, as a main goal. This document has been developed and agreed upon by all Australian State and Territory Education ministers and influences the way that education, including policies and curriculum, is currently administered in Australia. It is emphasized in this Declaration that equity of opportunity and equity of outcomes must be supported by educators (Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008, p. 15). Woods (2009), argues that if the quality of Australian schooling is to be judged on achieving a socially just outcome, then "we must first look to how strangers and the most at-risk students are dealt with within that system" (p. 99). Singh, Chang and Dika (2010) found that feelings of belonging and membership might be improved for minority group students "by changing the school policies to be student-centered and by enhancing opportunities to interact with teachers and with each other" (p. 172). Such a change requires a consolidated approach in mainstream school that incorporates "addressing learning, social and emotional needs of refugee-background students with a focus on inclusiveness and the celebration of cultural diversity" (Block, et al. p. 1352).

A consolidated approach would increase chances for a socially just and quality education for all as prescribed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) and promote belonging to school. Despite the increasing number of SRE settling in Australia, there exists no consolidated policy approaches or "standardised interventions" (Christie & Sidhu, 2002, in Murray et al. 2008, p. 14). The absence of specific policy discourse for SRE in host countries is seen by Sidhu & Taylor

(2007) as a significant omission. They claim that policies tend to be “buried among newly arrived migrants, learners with ESL needs, ESL learners, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds and students of cultural and linguistic backgrounds other than English” (p. 290).

The South Australian Department for Education and Child Development have produced a resource document ‘Count Me In’ aimed at supporting “a whole school response to students with refugee experience who have exited New Arrivals Program (NAP) centres,” and who enter mainstream schools (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2007, p. iv). However, this is not a policy, but a resource for staff.

The literature describes students’ experiences at mainstream school as inconsistent and reliant upon school structures and policies. The way that the ‘Count Me In’ document is used in schools to support students and educators is affected by this variance. Kirk and Cassity (2007, p. 53) suggest some consistent ‘minimum standards’ for the education of students, who are resettling in a new country, be established. These include engaging the students’ community and family, completing ongoing assessments and evaluations to ensure the best possible means of instruction, providing access to the learning environment to enhance physical, cognitive and psychological well-being, promoting effective teaching and instruction for students and enacting educational policies to best meet student needs.

It is widely reported in the literature (Apple 2009, 2011; Ball, 2003, 2015; Brown & DeLissov, 2011; Sleeter, 2012; Taylor 2008) that neoliberal government policies have influenced educational policy trends. These policy discourses provide “a regime of truth” of what constitutes successful teaching for educators and what constitutes successful schooling for students (Ball, 2015, p. 308). Taylor, (2008) states that neoliberal policies have resulted 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” (p. 3).

The literature points to SRE immersed at school, in a neo-liberal education system complete with the pressures of competition and High Stakes Testing such as The National Assessment Program (NAPLAN)⁵. The focus becomes the individual performance of students and other aspects of schooling such as social justice, social interaction and belonging may be overlooked. Current educational policies “privilege choice, competition, performance management, individual responsibility, and ‘risk management”, as well as a series of attacks on the cultural gains made by dispossessed groups” (Apple, Ball & Gandin, 2010, in Apple 2011, p. 223). Sleeter, (2012) ascertains that “policies that use standardisation and testing to tie education directly to economic productivity are in ascendance” and that culturally responsive pedagogy is in decline (p. 563). She states, “[g]lobally, over the last two decades, attention to culturally responsive, multicultural approaches to teaching have largely been supplanted by standardized curricula and pedagogy that derive from neoliberal business models of school reform” (p. 562). This is supported by Sidhu & Taylor, (2007) who claim standardisation “militates against the provision of a welcoming and caring environment” for young SRE (p. 296). “Welcoming environments create a sense of self-worth, security and belonging that enables students to form new relationships and make new friends. These in turn further intercultural understanding and promote commitments to justice and equality” (Hek, 2005a, 2005b, in Matthews, 2008, p. 40).

Structures and policies in school that aim to welcome SRE provide a framework for reconciliation and the development of social relationships (Hattam & Every, 2010, p. 421). It is recommended in the literature that all students to be given the opportunity

⁵ The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is an annual assessment for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It has been an everyday part of the school calendar in Australia since 2008. (National Assessment Program, 2015).

to feel welcomed and that they belong at school (Cartland & Ruch-Ross, 2003; Hughes & Beirens, 2007; Sidhu & Taylor, 2007; Singh et al., 2010; Taylor, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). Furthermore, Hattam & Every (2010) recommend that “unconditional hospitality” as defined by Derrida is extended to students and families of refugee experience (p. 421).

The move away from equity and social justice as a priority in education in Australia, brought on by the emphasis on outcomes based education and testing and league tables, “together with the lack of a specific policy focus on refugee education,” Taylor (2008) claims, leaves the education of refugee students left primarily to chance (p. 5). Whiteman (2005) agrees with this view and considers that the education of SRE is “approached differently by individual schools depending on their overall ethnic mix and the availability of resources and support networks” (p. 375). It is advised by Matthews (2008) that “[w]hole-school accounting for organizational processes and structures, policy and procedure move beyond piecemeal interventions that encourage deficit views of students (Miller et al. 2005) schools and teachers” (p. 42). The inconsistency of specific policies for the education of SRE along with potential restrictions created by existing structures may make it very difficult for students to navigate belonging at mainstream school. It is recommended by Christie and Sidhu (2002, in Murray et al. 2008) that an “over-arching education policy and funding agenda which acknowledges the complexity of the multiple systems involved in educating refugee children” would allow the symbolic rights to an education, to be translated into actual opportunities for SRE (p. 14). Such an agenda would promote inclusive practices in mainstream school. Inclusive practices in school foster a student’s ability to construct pathways to belonging.

Practice

The rituals, rules, values, discourses and traditions that present themselves as ‘taken for granted’ practices in schools have been shaped by history (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002) and emerge from the interaction of the cultural and structural context (p. 53). Practices or actions in a particular field may be viewed as the interactive consequences of habitus and cultural capital (discussed earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 3, Methodology) within the dynamics of the field (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 198). This then implies that the structural properties of schools can differentially favour certain dispositions and cultural practices thereby “sanctioning particular sets of resource-contingent socialised skills” (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014, p. 210). Thornberg (2008) explains further, that the “everyday life and the knowledge, rules, values, practices, and habits it contains, are social constructions, maintained by the social interactions and the language the actors share with each other” (p. 53). Students who attend mainstream school with a different set of socialised skills, from the endorsed normative of the school, might find mainstream school practices problematic.

The existing normative practices may promote or inhibit the construction of pathways to belonging for SRE if their voices are not heard within these practices. However, practices that aim to promote inclusivity and address issues such as racism may increase opportunities and enhance social cohesion through a sense of community and belonging (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). Pedagogical practices where the unique characteristics, knowledge and abilities of students are taken into account (Van Kraayennoord, 2007) allow all students to have a voice. Research by Singh et al. (2010) concluded that “[s]chools can design and implement practices that can enhance a sense of belonging and community for students” (p. 171). The practices described on ‘Recognising Racism and Taking Action’; ‘Supporting Inclusive School Practices’ and ‘Engaging Students through Supportive Pedagogies’, outlined in the following section

of the review, provide opportunities for successful educational experiences and promote pathways to belonging for SRE.

Recognising Racism and Taking Action

Prominent Critical Race theorist⁶ David Gillborn (2008a) describes racism as more than prejudice. He sees it as the norm and ingrained in the fabric of society (p. 29). Furthermore, Gillborn (2008b) states, “racism is a fundamental, organising principal of the contemporary education system” (p. 245). Schools are not separate from society, and therefore, students’ “experiences of racism in schools mirror what is happening in the wider community” (Rutter, 2001, p. 142). While all students in the school community are supposedly offered the same opportunities, students from minority ethnic groups may be unintentionally disadvantaged by the historical and political structures on which school communities are built (McCarthy & Vickers, 2008, p. 259). The complex diversity within school communities may not be reflected in the everyday practices of the school (McCarthy & Vickers, 2008).

Stereotyping of racial groups by school members might activate involuntary biases created during childhood socialization (Von Aspern, 2009, p. 7). Importantly, Derman-Sparkes and Phillips (1997, in Parks, 1999) recommend that in order to recognize the existence of racism in schools, educators are required to acknowledge the “beliefs, attitudes and symbols that are legitimized by those with cultural and political power and are socialized in successive generations” (p. 14). Research conducted by Von Aspern (2009) in South Australian Primary Schools, indicated that there is a clear association between skin colour and uneasiness of school members, which interferes significantly with relationship building within the school community (p. 7). Rutter (2006, p. 52-53) concludes from research in the UK that students from ethnic

⁶ Critical Race Theory (CRT) argues that racism is a normal practice in society. School as a primary institution of citizenship, is seen by CRT as a place where citizenship and race might interact (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 7).

minorities frequently experience bullying of a racist nature. She adds that the data indicates that there is an over-representation of students who are not white in mainstream school exclusions.

When transitioning to mainstream school, SRE might find that they are in a new school environment where they are a minority group and could experience “racist bullying or isolation” (Rutter & Stanton, 2001, p. 33). The literature strongly suggests that this might be in contrast to their experience at IELCs, where schooling practices recognise their cultural backgrounds. In relation to non-white SRE in particular this has serious implications for developing a sense of belonging. For example, Colic-Peisker, (2006) comments that SRE who are white, may experience “less prejudice and discrimination in comparison to other, visibly different, refugees” (p. 633). She explains that “the initial positive self-perception” of SRE as belonging to ‘white Australia’ can facilitate cross-cultural interaction in the early stages of resettlement (p. 633).

It is important to recognise that racist incidents in mainstream schools may be overt or covert. Overt racist incidents can be pervasive and might be experienced by students from peers, but also from adults (Walsh, 2010). Covert racism may occur for example when assumptions are made about what is to be included in the curriculum and in the structures, policies and practices in the school. Hickling-Hudson (2011) states that Eurocentric ideologies have “shaped a curriculum, pedagogy and school culture” that act together to the detriment of the personal success and cultural integrity of non-Western students (p. 475).

Acknowledging the existence of racism is thought to be a major factor influencing the successful school experiences of students in schools (Rizvi, 1990; Walsh, 2010).

Furthermore, Walsh (2010) states that racism may be a problem if the school community is regarded as a support mechanism for students, but is also the main place

in which many young people experience racist behaviour. Rutter (2001) advocates that schools challenge racism by looking closely at the school ethos, by evaluating the effectiveness of previous anti-racist work, by “using the curriculum to promote diversity” and by engaging other agencies (p. 146). She advocates that effective guidelines, monitoring and sanctions be implemented. Such sanctions should be understood by all school members, considered fair and consistently upheld.

Sanctions to address racism may be difficult to implement if a “racially inhabited silence” exists within school communities (Mazzei, 2008, p. 1127). This silence is a result of policies within schools that draw on ignoring difference as a mean of providing social equality. In school communities that are multicultural the practice of ignoring difference may result in ‘colour-blindness’ (Sleeter, 2001). It is argued by Critical Race Scholars that colour-blindness “ignores the fact that inequity, inopportunity, and oppression are historical artifacts that will not be easily remedied by ignoring race” (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004, p. 29).

A ‘multicultural’ view of community aligns with the conservative view of social justice where the existing social conditions, traditions, values and powers are maintained and social justice is seen as “fairness” providing equal opportunity (Starr, 1991, p. 21). This view leads to what McLaren (1995) terms conservative multiculturalism. The power in conservative multiculturalism, he asserts, lies in claiming a place for the hegemonic discourses to remain “safe and sovereignly secure” and for successful school membership to be based on established ‘truths’ such as test score results (p. 40). The literature endorses the view that this can result in the maintenance of the status quo, where the majority group as a privileged identity remains “unnamed, unnoticed and unspoken” (Mazzei, 2008, p. 1129) and inclusive practices are not implemented for SRE.

Supporting Inclusive School Practices

Inclusivity is a concept used frequently in educational discourse as a response to catering for diversity within schools. Its many interpretations result in it being enacted in many different ways (Forbes, 2007). Taylor and Sidhu (2012, in Block, et al. 2014), describe an inclusive education as one that “provides a curriculum that caters to a diverse range of students and accommodates diverse voices and perspectives so that all children feel they belong and can contribute” (p. 1340). In order for inclusion practices to be successful in schools, Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist (2003, 2011) recommend that the power and privilege imposed by majority groups be recognised, that Eurocentric social practices and policies be challenged and that curriculum that is anti-racist, socially just and global be created. More concretely, Apple (2011) suggests that educators ask questions of the required curriculum, “Whose knowledge is this? How did it become official? What is the relationship between this knowledge and who has social, cultural and economic capital?” (p. 229). Yuval-Davis (2011) questions the terms by which people “from different cultural, religious, linguistic” and historical backgrounds occupy the same social space and whether one (the less powerful) becomes the imitative version of the other (as with assimilation) or both groups exist alongside each other, but are disconnected (p. 26). Such questioning of “the natural order of things” (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2011, p. 463) will support the inclusion of SRE in mainstream school through promoting social justice. Arnot and Pinson (in Taylor, 2008), further state, that the inclusion of students of refugee experience in the culture of mainstream school is a “litmus test of the ethos of the school” (p. 13).

Important to consider, when implementing inclusion practices successfully in schools, is to ensure they are not practices of integration or assimilation. Assimilation results in attempts to force students to ‘fit in’ to established schools practices while integration results in programs that attempt to ‘fix’ students by using special programs, special

methods and specialised teachers (Due & Riggs, 2009). With integration and assimilation practices the onus is on the student to fit in to the existing school culture, structures and practices. Integration and cross-cultural programs in schools are not relevant if they do not result in in the “increased participation of students or an improved sense of wellbeing and belonging” (Von Aspern, 2009, p. 16). Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1991, in McBrien 2005) warn “ethnically and linguistically diverse children who are pressured to assimilate turn their anger and frustration inward, endangering themselves, or outward toward society” (p. 358). Assimilation and integration practices in mainstream school may affect how SRE negotiate friendships and complete activities as they navigate pathways to belonging both within and outside of the classroom.

Negotiating friendships is important for SRE as they search to belong at mainstream school. Research has found, that SRE can struggle to understand the rules for engagement that shape friendships in their new country (Anderson, 2001, in Riggs & Due, 2010, p. 73) and the “vernacular of the playground” (Rutter & Stanton, 2001, p. 33). There are physical spaces in which school structures and cultures are played out in everyday school practices. “Tensions may exist between children as they struggle to understand each other, or, much more common, avoid each other” (Von Aspern, 2009, p. 2). Play areas are important sites for SRE to “learn about social hierarchies and encounter cross-sections of society and new people, in some instances for the first time” (Kelly, 1994, in Due & Riggs, 2010, p. 26). They are spaces where SRE learn social norms that will shape their future and have “the ability to change the ways in which children behave, such as by encouraging different forms of social interaction” (Due & Riggs, 2009, p. 58). The development of positive relationships is important for SRE, for as Slee (1994, in Carrington & Robinson, 2006) reminds us “empowerment assumes

substantive changes in relationships”(p. 332). This requires the acceptance and inclusion in mainstream school of the stranger or the person ‘unknown’ (Taylor 2008).

The literature suggests that difficulties arise for SRE when they search for ways of connecting with peers who are part of an established relationship group. Here is where Bourdieu’s theory of social capital becomes important where social capital is a means by which the powerful may protect and further their interests against subordinate groups. On this matter, Field (2008, in Spaaij, 2012) stresses “[s]ocial capital tends to be positive for in-group members, but serves to bolster and reproduce inequality in the wider world,” (p. 1522). When inclusive practices are not adhered to in schools, students can be at risk of becoming socially and morally excluded and considered “undeserving of fair treatment” (Bland, 2012, p. 6). Such unfair treatment may be considered “normal, inevitable and deserved” (Bland, 2012, p. 6). A lack of social acceptance and understanding, experienced by SRE through the practices of the school, can result in a decreased sense of belonging for students (Williams & Butler, 2003). The absence of interaction between SRE and others can be considered to be the fault of the new arrivals, despite the lack of power new arrivals possess in their new setting (Riggs & Due, 2010, p. 77). Language and cultural knowledge, Riggs and Due (2010) found, played a part in shaping friendships. This point is supported by research by Fehr (1996) who concluded that friendships occur most frequently between people who are similar in several ways. However, a greater influence resides in existing power dynamics. Recognising this reality is essential to facilitate inclusive practices (Riggs & Due, 2010). It would take the focus away from a “well-meaning focus on the other” and reduce cultural barriers to inclusion for SRE (Riggs & Due, 2010 p. 80).

The point to be made here is that implementing inclusive practices in school can be powerful in shifting the existing power dynamics. It has been found that schools that have made the practice of involving parents and families paramount and the practice

of improving home to school communication a priority, are experiencing greater participation of minority group members (Taylor, 2008, p. 8). Research by Arnot and Pinson (2005, in Taylor, 2008) showed the importance of a “targeted policy and whole school approach” to the education of SRE (p. 13). “In terms of school ethos, the researchers found that the good practice schools had an ethos of inclusion and the celebration of diversity” and “a caring ethos and the giving of hope”(Taylor, 2008, p. 11). School communities, where all members are valued and respected and where developing a positive relationship between all school members is a priority, provide “the catalyst for learning in less bounded and more community focused ways” (Carrington & Robinson, 2006, p. 332). A study completed by Block, et al. (2014) also supported whole school practices to aid the education of SRE. They state that fostering “an environment of inclusiveness and acceptance and providing appropriate support for all students can remove barriers to participation and achievement and promote well-being across the school” (p. 1348).

Social and cultural development for SRE, through “critical pedagogy” and inclusive practices should be an essential feature of any educational program (Hones, 2007, p. 8). Critical pedagogy includes “the explicit teaching of values and cultural knowledge within a space of reconciliation – not integration”(Woods, 2009, p. 96). However, Riggs and Due (2011, p. 279) warn against employing the term reconciliation if it is “reconciliation to,” rather than “reconciliation with”. They claim genuine reconciliation occurs when two cultural groups meet halfway and terms for inclusion are negotiated that “are respectful of the histories of both groups” (Riggs and Due, 2011, p. 279). The implementation of pedagogical practices that promote engagement and inclusivity through reconciliation is essential for the successful school experience of SRE in mainstream school.

Engaging Students through Supportive Pedagogies

A pedagogy of engagement sees issues such as “gender, race, class, sexuality and post colonialism and language as so fundamental to identity that they need to form the basis of curricular organisation and pedagogy” for SRE (Pennycook, 1999, in Hones, 2008, p. 8). How educators respond to these issues and what aspects they chose to explore or ignore is crucial to the successful education of SRE and will influence their ability to develop pathways to belonging (Von Aspern, 2009, p. 16). SRE require involvement in “rich rather than restricted” pedagogical practices (Dooley, 2009, p. 10). A US study by Thomas and Collier (1997, in Dooley, 2009) found that it is “cognitively complex interdisciplinary tasks, rather than back-to-basics approaches that close cumulative academic gaps” between ESL students and students with sound English skills (p. 10). The significance of this for this research is that interdisciplinary tasks provide opportunities for students to use their own cultural knowledge and negotiate pathways to belonging.

Positive school experiences may be created from pedagogical practices that place SRE “in direct working relationships with non-refugee students,” so that peer relationships and friendships may develop (Closs, Stead, Arshad and Norris, 2001, in Riggs & Due, 2010, p. 79). This view is supported by Alton-Lee, Rietveld, Klenner, Dalton, Diggins and Town (2000) who claim that “mutually supportive, reciprocal participation” offers opportunities for peer connections to develop (p. 182). Such reciprocal participation is achieved through pedagogical practices that offer SRE opportunities to actively participate in curriculum activities such as art, music, dance, drama and sport (Due, Riggs & Augoustinos, 2014; Hones, 2007; Spaaij, 2012). These activities have been shown to provide opportunities for peer engagement and interaction and shared connections. For example, sport is an activity where “English language acquisition is able to occur in an arena that is less restricted by existing power relations” (Due &

Riggs, 2009, p. 60). Sporting activities provide opportunities to “cultivate a sense of belonging and reduce social isolation, especially when they are connected positively within the social fabric of local communities” (Spaaij, 2012, p. 1520). However, involvement for SRE in sport is not a solution to implementing inclusive pedagogies for students. Olliff (2008) comments that sport does offer opportunities “to promote the health, well-being and social inclusion of refugee young people,” but it is important that sport is not seen as a ‘cure all’ leading to other inclusive pedagogies being ignored or deemed unnecessary (p. 55). Pedagogical approaches that provide opportunities for cooperative learning or collaboration (Sleeter, 1992) where minority groups are encouraged to work with others in small groups encourages peer support and connectedness. Davila (2012) also draws attention to the importance of pedagogical practices where “opportunities for meaningful interaction with native English-speaking students through cooperative learning activities and peer tutoring” can occur (p. 147). As noted above, this represents a shift from the focus on the atomised individual pervasive in neo-liberal practice (Sleeter, 2012).

Connecting local practices with broader social ideologies brings in the question of values. Within the current framework of neo-liberal education policies, the teaching of values education in schools has taken on a political purpose (Clark, 2008; Richardson, 2005). Inherent in the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools (NFVEAS) policy, is the idea that a purpose of education is “protecting and honouring ideas of heritage that connect to nation and identity”(Ozga, 2000, p 10). Clarke (2008) expounds on the NFVEAS (introduced during 2003 to 2010) and notes that the framework was introduced with the notion that all students would accept, embrace and be taught the prescribed values without discussion or critical inquiry. The relevance of adhering to ‘take-for-granted’ historical, national loyalties and identities is questioned by Yuval-Davis (2011, p. 1). Due and Riggs (2009) point out that “negative

sentiment about 'illegal' refugees and the expectation of adherence to 'Australian values' extends to all migrants from non-English-speaking background countries" (p. 57). Due & Riggs (2010), McBrien (2005) and Calder (2010) suggest alternative practices to teaching values, other than the one offered by the NFVEAS (2011), may assist students to develop pathways to belonging. They suggest that when educators acknowledge, appreciate and work with the values and skills that students bring to school, students are more likely to feel welcomed and that they belong in their new school setting.

An important pedagogical practice is to create the conditions for students to engage and build connections between new knowledge and their existing knowledge base (Dooley, 2009; Gutstein & Peterson, 2005; Sleeter, 2013; Subban, 2006). In Australian schools, Dooley (2009) claims, the preferred method of teaching English through the genre approach, leaves SRE struggling with "the technical language taught in class" and not fully understanding concepts or able to locate information to complete tasks (p. 13). She considers it essential that SRE have opportunities to create "concept maps, retrieval charts and other graphic organisers for note-taking" and have "opportunities to talk ideas through to develop technical vocabulary and complex grammar before writing" (p. 13). Additionally, SRE require opportunities to link new content knowledge to their existing conceptual knowledge base. Their "[e]veryday life experiences prior to, and after re-settlement in the West, are rich with potential" for making these crucial links (Dooley, 2009, p. 5).

When minority group students are required to act in ways that are unfamiliar to their known cultural understandings and knowledge, misunderstandings and conflict may occur (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1996, p. 9). It is recommended by McBrien (2010) that educators be provided with professional development programs "that address innovative pedagogies in light of increasing linguistic and cultural diversity" in schools

(p. 88). Cultural sensitivity to pedagogical approaches is relevant, but not enough on its own. Garcia & Guerrad (2004) stress that “cultural sensitivity and awareness do not automatically result in equity practices” and that “professional development activities for educators must systematically and explicitly link equity knowledge to classroom practices”(p. 154). Gutstein and Peterson (2005) along with Ladson-Billings (1995) report on the importance of using relevant pedagogy for the successful schooling of SRE. Student cohorts are constantly changing and Miller, Windle & Yazdanpanah (2014) recommend professional development programs to “update teacher knowledge of productive responses to these changes”(p. 47). Sleeter (2012) agrees on the importance of an education program for teachers, parents and leaders about what culturally responsive pedagogy entails. Through the implementation of professional development programs, conservative ideas of multiculturalism that may be observed in ‘tokenistic’ gestures such as multicultural days will not be misinterpreted as culturally responsive pedagogy.

Summary and Implications

In summation, the literature suggests that primary school age SRE are faced with significant issues when they are immersed in mainstream school. The tripartite complexities of culture-structure-practice and their playing out in mainstream schooling make it problematic for SRE to develop pathways to belonging. Yet developing pathways to belonging at primary school can set students up for a positive educational journey in their country of resettlement and assist students with their transition to belonging in their new, potentially alien, environment. The scarcity of literature available on belonging to school for young primary school SRE, in mainstream Australian primary school, indicates the need for further exploration – which this research sets out to address.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INVESTIGATING BELONGING TO SCHOOL FOR SRE USING AN ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

"Daniel is very hard to relate to. Other adults in the school find the same thing with him..."

EALD Teacher

From the first time that I met Daniel he appeared to be a troubled student. He avoided eye contact and seemed wary of me. When I attempted to catch his attention he would turn his head away. My efforts to engage him in casual conversation invariably resulted in short answer responses and a clear desire to physically withdraw from what he felt was an uncomfortable situation. His EALD teacher tried to put me at ease by explaining that, despite being at the school for several years, Daniel had developed very few meaningful connections. She doubted that he would contribute to the research. However, I came to see Daniel – or the example of Daniel - as emblematic of the challenges and significance of this research. This example goes to the heart of the research methodology and the research design. Uncovering the issues that were making it difficult for Daniel to connect with others and the school culture required a methodology that was sensitive to the ways in which young people like Daniel understood and negotiated school life. As earlier outlined in Chapter 1, the focus research question is;

'How do students of refugee experience navigate pathways to belonging within their mainstream schooling experience?'

My pursuit to understand SRE like Daniel, and their struggles to negotiate with school life, required my involvement in the school to be more than just a visitor – or a 'detached' researcher. The study required that as much as I could, I participated in the

daily school lives of students. It was only from being present that I could really begin to interpret ‘the meanings and experiences’ of students in, what qualitative researchers like Burgess (1984) refer to as, their ‘natural setting’ (p. 78). In this research ‘natural setting’ is taken to mean the social spaces where daily lives of people come together in their enculturated and structured practices.

The Literature Review has highlighted the important influence of school culture, structure and practices on the development of pathways to belonging for SRE. There is a reciprocal relationship between culture, structure and practices in schools.

Developing understandings of how these features work together is essential for making meaning of the daily school life interactions of SRE. These interactions are represented in Figure 3.1 below, which shows culture, structure and practice as mutually dynamic. It also reveals that culture and structure are observable in daily actions and practices. The strong mutuality of the tri-partite relation demands that observation be participatory.

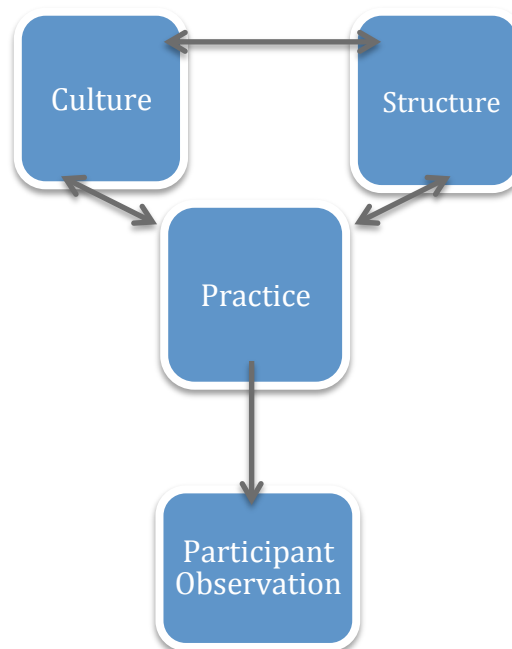


Figure 3.1: The ‘Structure-Practice-Culture’ Relation and Participant Observation

Daniel and other SRE are engaged in negotiating and renegotiating pathways to belonging as they are immersed in the mutuality of structure, culture and practices of mainstream school. Their journey to their new country, their cultural understandings and knowledge together with their unfamiliarity with Western mainstream schooling, makes this problematic for them. Bourdieu connects with the idea of identity, structure and agency when understanding how individuals interact within a social space or activity (Block, 2013). Fields of social activity, such as schools, have legitimized ways of “being, thinking and acting, in which individuals occupy positions of inferiority, equality and superiority” (Block, 2013, p. 135). Bourdieu credits such superiority dependent on an individual’s “economic, cultural and social capital” in relation to other members of the field (Block, 2013) and that it may result in power dynamics that exclude some or include others (p. 135). Yuval-Davis (2011) sees such power dynamics responsible for creating boundaries to belonging, that “sometimes physically, but always symbolically”, separate the population into ‘them and ‘us’ (p. 20). These theoretical viewpoints bring understandings of cultural capital, agency, normative views and power dynamics to the research. They draw attention to the importance of theory to the methodological logic of a research design.

Methodological Logic of the Research

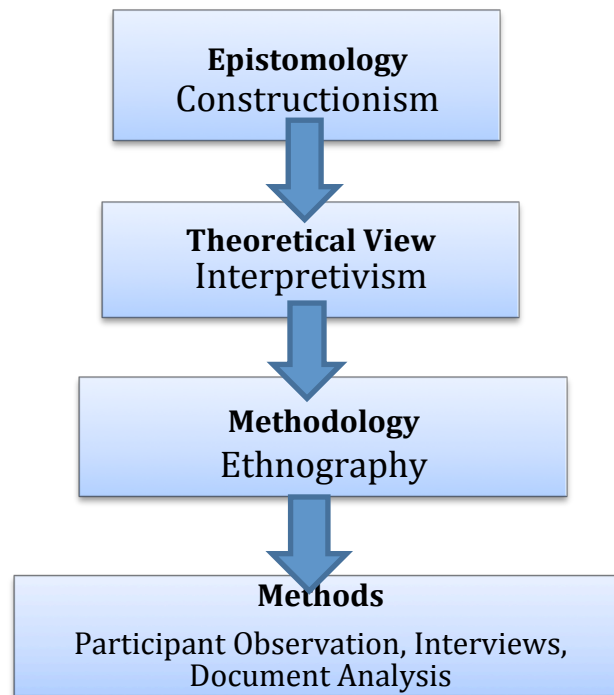


Figure 3.2: Methodological Logic of the Research (adapted from Crotty, 1998, p. 4)

Figure 3.2 explains the broad logic that frames the research. A Social Constructionist epistemology, where the emphasis is given to the active creation of structures and cultures shaping the making of social meaning (Crotty, 1998), was adopted. It offered a way of grasping the dynamics of social injustice via the structured and cultured practices of school life. My concern with social justice in education informed what can be called a critical approach to the research (Anderson, 1989; Carspecken, 1996).

The empirical dimension of the research was directed to capturing the special features of the participants' interactions (Denzin, 1989, p. 2) in their social situations that guided their negotiations to belonging. Adopting an interpretivist approach compelled me to be sensitive to the "culturally derived and historically situated" (Crotty, 1998) understandings of the students at the school (p. 67). The aim was for me, the

researcher, to see the school world grounded in the world of the participants' lived experiences (Denzin, 1989, p. 10).

To achieve this, a substantive research methodology was necessary that allowed me to be part of the lived reality of SRE. Ethnography is a style of research where the principle objectives are "to understand the social meanings and activities of people in a given 'field' or setting" (Brewer, 2000, p. 11). An ethnographic approach was chosen as the most appropriate means to research the focus question. In Brewer's (2000) terms this research can be described as a 'little'⁷ethnography where its object is to study people in their natural occurring setting and to use methods that are "unstructured, flexible and open-ended" (Brewer, 2000, p. 18).

Ethnography, in its 'little' sense offers educational researchers a holistic means of grasping students' meanings in context (Anderson, 1989; Brewer, 2000). Choosing an ethnographic approach to this study provided me with the means to 'get inside' the way that students experience and see the world (Crotty, 1998, p. 76). Through my regular involvement in the life of the school over the period of a school term, I became an 'insider' to the participants' accounts, interpretations, understandings and social meanings of everyday school interactions (Brewer, 2000). An ethnographic approach provided opportunities to "learn and listen" (Denzin, 1989) to the student participants as they interacted and participated in school life (p. 10). My role as an 'insider' delivered occasions for me to qualify experiences, rather than objectively quantify them as an 'outsider'. The insights gained as an 'insider' provided rich, descriptive details of students' everyday interactions. I was able to grasp and then analyse what students shared in common and "what helps to bring meaning to their lives" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 150). Additionally, an ethnographic approach provided a means to faithfully reconstruct the participants' perspectives through meaningful

⁷ Ethnography may be also understood as a synonym for qualitative research and may be used to describe any approach that avoids surveys as a means of collecting data. This is what Brewer (2000, p. 17-18) describes as 'big' ethnography.

description, rather than abstract measurements (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 29) i.e. the documentation of the often subtle and complex relationships (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) between culture, structure and practice in the development of pathways to belonging.

The school world of SRE is not one that is simply imposed, but “involves subjective meanings and experiences that are constructed by participation in social situations” (Burgess, 1984, p. 78). My participation in that world provided the opportunity to interpret the world of students from their perspectives. It also opened windows to “reveal the taken-for-granted, common-sense nature” of the everyday school reality (Brewer, 2000, p. 60). Important to using this method was for me to build trust and develop relationships with participants and others within the school (Burgess, 1984). This was approached carefully and involved a time commitment in the field⁸. In this way I was able to penetrate the social situations of participants in a ‘natural’ way (Burgess, 1984) where my presence became part of the participants’ ‘normal’ daily school world. Important too, was to maintain my role as a researcher and maintain ethical behaviour as I developed relationships with participants and blended into their daily routines (Burgess, 1984).

Comparisons of data collected from observations revealed shared patterns of understandings and meanings (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) for participants of belonging to school. This method opened possibilities for me to question and reflect on problems and issues that have been identified by others (see Chapter 2 Literature Review) and to support or refute these as I collected data (Burgess, 1984, p. 79).

Other research methods, such as surveys and questionnaires, would not have afforded the rich data on participant’s pathways of belonging that I pursued. The limited English

⁸ I collected data for 1 to 2 days a week over one school term. Entry to the field had been negotiated during the previous school term.

skills of participants, their young age, their pre and post settlement issues and experiences with acculturation and their lack of familiarity with the Australian schooling system, would have made it very difficult to obtain data by such methods. My interactions with students as a participant observer granted students occasions to question and talk informally with me in a setting in which they were comfortable.

Empirical Research Design: Data Collection and Analysis

Figure 3.3, depicts the approach to data gathering and analysis employed in this research. It shows a cyclic process whereby the concepts and issues identified in the Literature Review (see Chapter 2) were brought into mutual consideration with empirical fieldwork data.

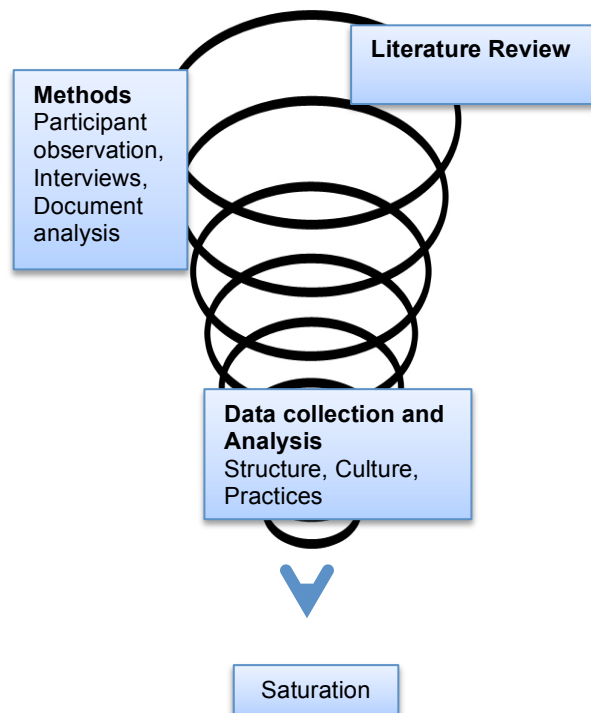


Figure 3.3: The Ethnographic Process

This chapter continues with descriptions and discussion of the project's data collection and data analysis methods. It concludes with a consideration of a number of methodological issues relevant to the research.

Data Collection Methods

My time commitment to the study provided opportunities to experience a range of activities experienced by students occurring in the setting (Brewer, 2000). Flexible means were used to collect data, principally by participant observation. Data collection was achieved by participating in the school and class activities and by documenting data systematically without imposing meaning on it (Brewer, 2000, p 6). I viewed the experiences of participants as dependent on a multiplicity of locations and positions in the school setting that were socially constructed (Tedlock, 2000, p. 471). Documentation involved taking field notes systematically, during observations, interviews and document analysis. Field notes captured the day-to-day happenings, to be described as data, of the students' perspectives, interactions and understandings. Regular and ongoing maintenance of field notes assisted to ensure trustworthiness of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

- ***Participant Observation***

Participant observation was the principle method of data collection employed in this research. In participant observation "the researcher is the main instrument of social investigation" (Burgess, 1984, p. 79). However, the method may take several forms (see Figure 3.4). Approaches to participant observation might be described as existing on a continuum between 'complete participation' to 'complete observer'. I employed the participant-as-observer role (Burgess, 1984) for this research. This is between the two continuum extremes, but lies more to the 'participant' end. The difficulties that may arise for the researcher from adopting this approach are, combining data collection

with social tensions, recognizing researcher biases, deciding on how much to participate and 'going native' (Burgess, 1984, p. 82). 'Going native' occurs if the researcher's critical judgment as a researcher is affected when their role is replaced entirely by their involvement in the setting (Denzin, 1989). I avoided this danger by adhering to the practice of regularly recording field notes, talking often with participants and colleagues (Denzin, 1989, p. 175) and taking frequent breaks from the field for reflection and the recording and analysis of the data collected (Burgess, 1984, p. 81).

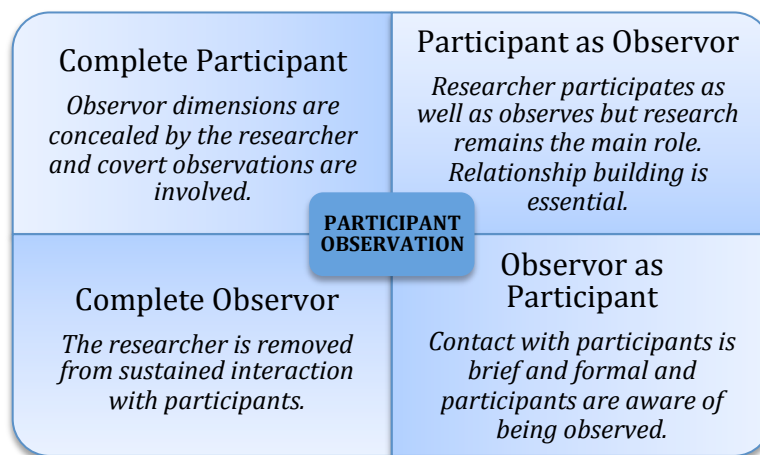


Figure 3.4: The Roles of Participant Observation (as taken from Burgess, 1984, pp. 80-82)

I observed and gathered data as teachers and students interacted in the daily activities of school life. I watched, listened, observed and talked with participants, so I might begin to understand “their interpretations, social meanings and activities” (Brewer, 2000, p. 59). Observations were made in the students’ classrooms, the playground and during other school activities as students interacted with others. Detailed field notes of participants’ interpersonal relationships, peer interactions and their participation in school pursuits were made (Brewer, 2000).

- *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this research. Structured interviews, where a large group of people may be recruited and the focus is on forming “generalised statements” after interviewing (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989, p. 81), would not have served the purposes of this research. Additionally, according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989), structured interviews may lead to the participants’ answers being confined to yes/no answers making it difficult to obtain the type of data that I sought. It would also be difficult to gather data from unstructured interviews with a small group of participants who did not have English as their first language and who were coping with acculturation tensions.⁹ I did not have the background knowledge of students’ “life-history, outlook, customs, and life-style” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) essential to the success of an unstructured interview (p. 86).

The choice of semi-structured, face-to-face interviews reflected the interpretivist commitment of this research. In conducting interviews, a list of open questions and prompts was used to encourage discussion of issues pertaining to the research question (Appendix A). This list was explained to all participants that were interviewed and was useful to ensure that a range of themes was covered for all student participants (Burgess, 1984). It was important that I had successfully established a relationship of trust with participants before interviewing occurred (Burgess, 1984). In my role as a participant observer I endeavored to foster trusting relationships with participants. Interviews easily slipped into “conversations with a purpose” with the direction of these conversations at least partly shaped by the will of the participants (Burgess, 1984, p. 102). Participants were informed that they could ask questions at any stage during the interview process. In fact several students asked me about myself and my family and my professional life. I was honest and open with

⁹ See interview transcript with Jamin in Chapter 4 (p.37) that reveals this complexity.

students while maintaining an ethical relationship as a researcher. As such, the process of interviewing involved being empathetic and actively engaged in attentive listening (Denzin, 1989, p. 109).

Interviews took place in a room that was identified by students and teachers as a private, familiar and safe place and where auditory and visual privacy were ensured. The interviewing process was conducted for fifteen to twenty minutes dependent upon the participants' needs and contextual factors such as the teacher's need to have the participant return to the class. Each participant was interviewed twice to provide opportunities for meaningful discussion. Further interviews were held with student participants who expressed an interest to continue their conversations with me. Data collected from interviews supplemented data gathered by participant observation. Field notes were taken during interviews where appropriate and interviews were audio recorded for later partial transcription¹⁰.

Prior to interviewing student participants, I discussed the themes to be covered during interviewing with class teachers. This was an ethical consideration. This discussion afforded teachers an occasion to flag any potential issues for students prior to interviews. I also discussed with teachers, any imperative matters that emerged from the interviews.¹¹ Parents/caregivers of participants were offered opportunities to be interviewed, however, only one parent volunteered for this. This data provided a separate perspective on student belonging and enabled the parent to be collaboratively involved in the research.

While class teachers were not formally interviewed, they provided me with informative data via informal conversations. They were aware that their insights were

¹⁰ According to Poland (1999) all transcripts are partial representations of a reality as the "quality of transcripts can be adversely affected by deliberate, accidental, and unavoidable alterations of the data" (in Lapadat & Lindsay 1999, p. 75).

¹¹ This was an additional ethical consideration. It was important that teachers were aware of any significant issues so that they could support students. This was explained to students prior to interviewing and discussed sensitively with them.

to be collected as part of my data collection process. This data was largely information about context dealing with the school setting and the student participants' relations to it. However, formal interviews were conducted with the two EALD teachers at the school. These teachers had an extensive history of working with migrant and refugee students at Kurlu Primary and they worked closely with the student participants. They voiced their understandings of the mutually dynamic relation of culture-structures-practice and its impact on the successful schooling of the student participants.

- *Document Analysis*

A limited analysis of school documents was used to supply contextual information for the project and insights into the refugee journey of participants. Documents provided an additional source for data collection and analysis and were used for triangulation purposes. They had the advantage as a data source of being “unsolicited”, non-contrived, non-reactive and possible sources “of some longitudinal data” (Brewer, 2000, p. 72). The documents examined provided a stable source of data and events as they had happened in the past (Brewer, 2000) and a “rich source of information, contextually relevant and grounded in the contexts they represent” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277). Data from documents had the additional benefit of being framed in the language of the context (Brewer, 2000) and possessing information that had satisfied an accountability requirement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 277).

Documents were primary documents and included school and Education Department policy documents, enrolment documents and school reports. They provided information on the students' academic progress and socio-emotional development, within IELCs and the current school and recommendations that had been given for students' future education. Additionally, school documents provided some information on the settlement history of students and insights of the acculturation process. Generalisations were not

drawn from document analysis as there were inconsistencies in the documents available and the document analysis was completed at one site with a small number of participants (Brewer, 2000). Permission to access school documents was sought during the informed consent process, from DECD and the principal at the school.

Data Analysis Methods

Figure 3.3 depicts the data analysis method, its relation to data gathering and how saturation was reached. It illustrates the process whereby data were analysed and gathered concurrently. All data were read to develop an overall understanding of the information that had been collected. The research concluded when saturation of the emerging educational issues pertaining to the research question ‘How do students of refugee experience navigate pathways to belonging within their mainstream schooling experience?’ had been reached. School culture, structure and practice surfaced as influential features on developing belonging, during data collection and analysis.

Methods used for analysis were as follows. Audio records were partially transcribed and field notes were examined for data categorisation and analysis. Figure 3.3 illustrates the process whereby I considered the transcribed data and my field notes while considering the broader literature. From here themes emerged which were continually reviewed in line with new and existing data. This was a kind of distillation process that also involved an element of, what Thomas (1993) refers to as ‘defamiliarising’ (p. 43). In practicing distillation, I was forced to remove my thinking from the immediacy of the setting and to view it analytically and critically. Bringing analysis and data gathering together pushed me to “slip out of intimacy” from those relationships developed in the field (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. 80).

Prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation and member

checking were all used in the research to increase the probability that credible results were produced (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My committed engagement of collecting data over an entire school term provided opportunities to build trust and rapport and also provided scope to the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 303). Continued, persistent observation afforded depth to the research by providing opportunities for me to examine taken for granted understandings, explore them in detail and identify those elements that were of importance for the research question (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304).

Triangulation between the field notes from participant observation, interviews and document analysis ensured a more balanced interpretation of the categories formed from document analysis (Brewer, 2000). It was used to improve the “correspondence between the analysis and the ‘reality’ it sought to represent faithfully” (Brewer, 2000, p. 75). This also provided opportunities to enrich the evidence from the data and to identify any potential errors (Thomas, 1993).

Member checking consisted of showing emerging findings and categories from the research to the participants and seeking verification that the analysis corresponded to what the participants had said and done. This process, whereby “data, analytical categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested” with members from the participant group is the “most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 374). During the research period I spoke continuously with participants to verify emerging data. I visited the school after the data analysis was completed and spoke individually with the participants, to offer them a chance to validate or negate the emerging categories from the data. Stuhlmiller (1996) supports member checking and claims “One way to insure the validity or truth of an accurate account is to have it verified by the subjects themselves. They must recognize the interpretation as matching their own” (p. 38).

I have attempted to represent the findings from the research in a clear and accessible way for both researchers as well as educational practitioners and policy makers. In this way other researchers may be able to follow the decision trail used in the study. This has provided auditability of the research. With the intention of representing the research accurately and allowing others to “assess the representation” of the study (Brewer, 2000, p. 142), the relevant methodological issues have been identified and described in what follows.

Methodological Issues

In order to provide a clear and auditable description of the research methodology it is relevant to describe some significant methodological issues. These issues have been presented clearly to provide understandings of the complexities of the research project.

Recruitment of the Participants

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Flinders University Ethics Committee (SBREC) (Appendix B) and the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) (Appendix C). Purposeful, opportunistic sampling was used to source participants from one South Australian School. Information on school websites supplied me with some possible schools sites where the research could be conducted. A school was approached based on the criteria that there was a significant representation of SRE included in the school population. Gaining the support of the school’s Principal was an important consideration in selecting a suitable school. The Principal of the school, that became the research site, was supportive of the study and gave her consent for the research to be conducted after being informed about the study (Appendix D & E).

Possible participants for the study included class teachers and other staff at the school, SRE and some students who had no refugee experience. Parents of possible participants were also offered the opportunity to be involved in the study if they wished to contribute. Additionally an adult university student was recruited who provided some reflections on his early educational experiences in South Australia, as a SRE, after resettlement. All participating adults signed the consent forms (Appendix F).

Class teachers were invited to volunteer to participate in the study after I presented an outline of the research at a staff meeting. Two class teachers volunteered to participate in the research and gave their consent after further details of the study, including their anticipated commitment to the study, were provided to them and explained. The two EALD teachers, the school counsellor and deputy principal all volunteered to support the research and after providing consent they were recruited.

Volunteer teachers approached possible student participants in their class to gauge students' interest in being involved in the study. I had discussed this method of recruitment with the class teachers before they consented to participate. This method of recruitment was an attempt to avoid coercion of students and was considered a less threatening way to approach students. Class teachers had an established relationship with their students that I, the researcher, who was new to the context, did not.

Students, who had settled in Australia under the United Nations High Commission for Refugees guidelines, were to be initially approached by teachers. However, I learnt that teachers were unaware of some students' refugee experience and their resettlement status. The school principal and EALD teacher assisted teachers and me with this process by examining the students' enrolment data to establish their settlement status. All students who met this criterion were invited to participate, as this was not a study of race, religion or cultural grouping.

The class teachers also approached some possible student participants who did not have refugee experience to gauge their interest in being involved in the study. The inclusion in the study of students without refugee experience was employed as a means of averting focus, within the school community, away from the refugee participants. This was an ethical consideration that had been outlined and approved in the SBREC and DECD Ethics applications and took focus away from refugee students being perceived as 'the other'. For this reason too, the research was explained to the school community as a study concerned with examining the way that students developed pathways of belonging at school.

The participating class teachers initially introduced the research to the students by assembling both classes together. At this time they summarised the aims of the research and explaining my presence in the school. A script that I had prepared previously for teachers was used to explain the research (Appendix G). An article in the school newsletter had earlier been sent home, to explain the research and my presence in the school, to the school community (Appendix H). I met with the group of possible participants and was accompanied by the school counsellor. This was the school leaders' preferred way to explain the research to the possible participants. It was viewed as a non-threatening way to present the research to students, as the school counsellor was a person with whom students already had a trusting relationship.

The general nature of the research was explained to this group, including their possible involvement. Students were invited to ask questions and a letter of introduction from me, was given to the students who appeared interested in participating (Appendix I). The school counsellor asked students to acquire their parents' signature if they wished to be included in the study and if their parents agreed to their inclusion. In this way the class teachers and I would have an indication of the students who would require informed consent. I was assisted with the collection of

these forms by the school counsellor, as I was not present at the school all hours of the school week.

The resulting group of students who showed interest in being participants were from various home countries. Two were from African countries, two were from Asian countries and two were not refugees. The small number of students for this ethnographical study enabled me to look deeply at the development of pathways to belonging for students in mainstream school. Culturally appropriate pseudonyms have been used for the participants and for the school. For the purposes of this study only the data collected from SRE has been used.

A newly arrived female SRE was also included for consideration in the study. In my role as a participant observer it was possible to observe her as she settled in to her new surroundings both in the classroom and outside in the schoolyard.

Consent of Student Participants

Informed consent was required from parents for students to be eligible to participate in the research as they were all under the age of eighteen. There were many difficulties associated with gaining informed consent for SRE including lack of availability of parents and their low literacy skills in their first language. The intended methods of translating information documents (Appendix J) and student consent forms (Appendix K) into participants' first language, proved to be unsuccessful for many participants. It was necessary to seek the assistance of others to support me with the process of gaining informed consent. Assistance with interpretations was sought from older family members of participants, a fellow research student at the university and the DECD interpreter service. Approval from the SBREC ethics committee for this adjustment was given. Forms were explained and signed by parents/caregivers with

this additional support. After the completion of the formal consent process, four SRE and 2 students who did not have refugee experience were recruited for the research study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was gained from the SBREC of Flinders University and permission to conduct the research in South Australian schools was gained from DECD. Both organisations considered participants to be members of a vulnerable group due to their young age and their experiences of being refugee people. Ethical considerations were important influences affecting the methodology approach used.

I acted with professional integrity throughout my time in the field. I am confident that my research was “worthwhile” and that my methods used were “appropriate” (Brewer, 2000, p. 91). Information about the research was provided to participants and their parents and informed consent was acquired as students were under the age of 18 (AERA, 2011). Every effort was made to ensure that parents were adequately informed about the research. Difficulties with language acquisition of students and families were acknowledged and documents were translated into the participants’ first language where applicable. The low level of parental literacy in their home language was a significant consideration. The assistance of bilingual assistants was sought where necessary as it was important to be clear to all concerned about the purpose and benefits of the research (Brewer, 2000). I knew that people of refugee experience might have little knowledge or previous experience with educational research (Tilbury, 2006).

Participants were fully informed of what their participation entailed and were told that they may opt out of the study at any time (Brewer, 2000). No previous or continuing

records were made for students who opted out. No enticements or coercion were used to encourage students, parents or teacher to participate. As much as was possible the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured including the use of appropriate pseudonyms in written material (Brewer, 2000).

I was open and transparent to participants about the data collection process and respectful to all at the site. Gradually rapport was built with others at the site and efforts made to enter and exit the site gradually (Brewer, 2000). Conducting the research in Term 4 ensured that the completion of the research period tied in well with the end of the school year. This provided an exit strategy from the site that brought the least disruption to participants (Brewer, 2000).

Steps were taken to ensure the safety and protection from harm of participants. This was an essential consideration when working with young, possibly vulnerable SRE (Brewer, 2000). I was open and accountable and involved participants as active partners in the research as a “core ethical principle of human agency” (Hugman, Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2011, p. 656). An aim of the research was to add value to the lives of the participants, recognising them as subjects in the process not just as sources of data (Hugman, et al. 2011; Pittaway, Bartolomei & Hugman, 2010). I recognised that as a researcher my identity had an impact on the research relationship with participants. This relationship was understood in the context of the imbalance of power between young SRE participants and me (Hugman, et al. 2011, p. 1284). Therefore, acting ethically and being reflexive were integral to every stage of the research process (Hugman, et al. 2011).

Reflexivity

It was important during the research process to be “explicit and open about the

circumstances which produced the extant data” (Brewer, 2000. p. 43) including my position within the social world that I was studying. I was aware of the need to be reflexive of constructs, data, and my own bias, gender, race, feelings, beliefs and age, (Brewer, 2000) as these factors could have influenced my re-presentations of the happenings. This also included an awareness of the structural and historical forces that have shaped my understandings (Anderson, 1989, p. 255). Any biases have been made explicit in the ethnographic account and my impressions have been checked against other sources. Important too, is to note that as an experienced teacher, I brought a wide range of experiences to the research and that some of these experiences assisted me in the study. My gender, race and age were the norm for the teaching staff at the site and these could have assisted me to blend into the established adult hierarchy of the school. However, I acknowledge that my presence in the school was not neutral and that I have contributed to the domain that I have described. I note that differences between the students and myself of race, language and age may have influenced the lens through which the happenings are retold (Burgess, 1984).

This research has been strengthened by my clarity of explanations for my selection of the methodology. The process used for recruiting the participants, and any issues that I have encountered have been explained transparently. Clear accounts have been given for the relevance of the setting and topic, my social relations within the setting, my experiences during the research process and any strengths or weaknesses of the research design. The time and nature of situations where observations occurred have also been recorded systematically (Denzin, 1989). A critical attitude to the data has been employed and I have considered any influences that may have had on the interpretation of the data (Brewer, 2000). Any statements made about the social world of the participants have been considered while “being sensitive to problems relating to representation and legitimation” (Brewer, 2000, p. 133). Accordingly,

acknowledgement has been made of my efforts to be included “part and parcel of the setting, context and culture” that I was studying (Altheide & Johnson, 1998 in Brewer, 2000) and that my interpretation of the data is only one way of looking at the research (p. 127).

Re-Presenting the Data

In this study participants were invited to describe their experiences of belonging to school and to tell their stories. Winslade and Monk (1999) declare “We live our lives according to the stories we tell ourselves and the stories that others tell about us” (p. 2). Stories were chosen as a more representative way to describe the experiences of the participants for “When we quantify experience, its richness and its expression are stripped away”(Clandinin & Connelly 2000, p. xxvi). Through storytelling, openings to educate the self and others, including the young, but also myself, as a researcher, were revealed. Stories provide a focus on human agency (Hones 2007) and help individuals humanize ‘the other.’ It opens up possibilities for more “humane and compassionate understandings” (Hale, et al. 2008, p. 1420).

The representation of the data, Chapter 4, has been written as a narrative discussion to describe the experiences of the participants from both my role as a participant observer and from the participants themselves. Bridging narrative with an ethnographic approach Hale et al. (2008) claim, “provides educators with an avenue for the education of self and others, the world they live in, how that world affects the educational experiences of their students, and ultimately the role they can play to make an ever greater difference in the lives of their students”(p. 1425).

CHAPTER 4: FROM THE FIELD

STORIES OF BELONGING

Behind each of the 51 million people displaced is a human story.

António Guterres, (2014)

The stories of four participants are told in this chapter. Each student had his or her own story of displacement and resettlement in Australia. However, all students had an important characteristic in common. They had all, along with their families, fled their home country to seek safety in Australia.

Zaria¹² had arrived in Australia eight years ago as a pre-schooler from a refugee camp in Africa. It is likely that her family had left their home country as the result of a brutal war that had occurred where many people were killed, mutilated and raped (UNHRC, 2000). Daniel also arrived in Australia from an African refugee camp. His home country had previously experienced a period of violent, political, unrest following post-election insecurity (UNHCR, 2005). He had been settled in Australia for six years. Myat migrated to Australia from a refugee camp in South-East Asia. The regular occurrence of torture and rape by the military against certain minority communities in his home country may have led to feelings of unsafety and uncertainty for his family's future (Amnesty International, 2014). He, along with his family, had fled to a refugee camp in a neighbouring country. Jamin and his family had arrived in Australia from a refugee camp in Asia. His parents had likely left their home country after a 'One People' policy was introduced and enforced (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous People, 2015) during which time many people in minority groups had been forced to migrate. Jamin had been born in the refugee camp.

¹² Pseudonyms have been used for all participants and schools in the study.

Additionally the story of Elisabeth has been told. Elisabeth was a newly arrived student to Kurlu Primary School. She had moved from a refugee camp and had transitioned from an IELC into mainstream school during the data collection phase of the research (see Chapter 3). Elisabeth's story is important. Although some of Elisabeth's experiences could be attributed to her being 'the new kid at school' her experiences illustrate the complexities immediately faced by students of refugee experience, as they negotiate the social environment of the school. In my role as a participant observer I watched and listened as Elisabeth interacted with others. Her teachers' on-going comments to me provided further insights into her negotiations to belonging. Her story is told below and is followed by the stories of the four participants.

Elisabeth

Elisabeth sat alone on top of a table on the school oval. She cut a solitary and silent figure. Her isolation was contrasted with - and was made all the more apparent by - the frenzied activity and interaction of other students around her. With head down, Elisabeth's eyes occasionally glanced at the world rushing around her. The scene grabbed my attention because it was only minutes before that I had noticed Elisabeth emerging from a nearby classroom with a group of girls.

She had walked at the fringes of the group and had placed her hand very briefly on the shoulder of a group member. Full of energy, the girls had proceeded noisily towards the oval and sat down around one of its tables. At this point, my eyes were diverted from the group. It was when I turned to the table again that I saw Elisabeth sitting alone. The other girls had left her.

Elisabeth remained sitting atop the table for a few minutes. She was deflated. Her shoulders were slumped and her head was downcast. Whether Elisabeth chose to move away from the group, or was rejected by them, was unclear. Whatever the case, her body language and facial expressions suggested to me a quiet sadness. Elisabeth eventually left the table and joined an older group of students. When I told Elisabeth's teacher of her dilemma, he informed me that one of the older girls was Elisabeth's sister. He said that Elisabeth generally spent time with her sister and a cousin at break times. I took him to mean that this was her preference.

Elisabeth and her sister had arrived at Kurlu Primary at the beginning of term 4, right at the commencement of my participation in the school. Her class teacher informed me that Elisabeth was from a Central African refugee camp. I was advised from the administration at the school that her accompanying notes from the IELD centre documented family experiences of trauma. The EALD teacher informed me, that support agencies were working with Elisabeth's family. She explained that Elisabeth and her sister had significant hygiene issues.

I had previously attended a cultural evening of newly arrived people to Australia. The evening was an initiative of resettled people from Elisabeth's home country. At this event, a group of women, dressed in traditional clothes, had made an impassioned plea for everyone to think about the women and girls left behind in their country. They described the constant fear for women and girls of assault in a country that had one of the highest incidences of female sexual assault, worldwide. Sexual violence and other violence against females and young people were used in this country as a war weapon, but was also a common occurrence in domestic situations. 'Rape and associated violence against civilians... have been widely employed as weapons in the multiple regional and civil wars that have plagued the eastern provinces' of the country (Pratt, Werchick, Bewa, Eagleton, Lumumba, Nichols, & Piripiri, 2004, p. 7). Although I had no

knowledge that Elisabeth had been subject to this type of violence, her withdrawn behaviour suggested that the transition to her host country had not been smooth.

As I participated in the daily routines of school life, I observed Elisabeth continue in her efforts to make connections with others. I discerned further incidences of possible exclusion or lack of inclusion of Elisabeth. Two specific incidents occurred during sporting activities and arose from the practices of group formation that were used. The main purpose of these activities was physical fitness and skills development. However, both activities could have provided opportunities for team building and inclusivity¹³, important for Elisabeth as she negotiated pathways to belonging, and important social justice considerations.

On one occasion when I was outside, I observed Elisabeth's class playing a game. I watched as Elisabeth approached several students again and again in her quest to find a partner for the game, only to be rejected each time. But I noticed Elisabeth's resilience as she walked to her teacher, talked with her and was consequently placed in a group.

A week later, when I was on the oval, I observed a similar incident of exclusion occurring for Elisabeth. She was with her class about to participate in a sporting activity. I watched and listened as students again formed their own groups. I observed Elisabeth to be the last remaining student sitting without a group. And once again I observed her persistence and resilience. I saw her approach a group of students and then walk away. However, I noted that this time, after being rejected once, she did not approach other groups, but moved directly to the teacher. I observed the teacher place her in a group and, despite no noticeable interaction from her peers Elisabeth actively participated in the activity. I watched as Elisabeth again showed her athletic ability. I

¹³ See the 'Supporting Inclusive School Practices' section in Chapter 2.

found myself questioning why others were constantly rejecting Elisabeth in activities where she proved to have outstanding skills? What else was happening beyond the immediacy of what I was observing?

I had heard Elisabeth speak English confidently to others, so her interactions with her peers did not appear to be limited by her language skills. Yet I observed her to be rejected or ignored in her attempts to make connections with her others. I know from my previous experience as a teacher, that it is difficult for any new student to break into an established friendship group in term four of the school year. However, the welcoming environment of the school and classrooms suggested to me that there was more at play here than Elisabeth's 'newness' to mainstream school.

I again noted Elisabeth's isolation during swimming activities. I had been invited by one of the participants to attend the school swimming lessons. Elisabeth was also there. She was in a lower swimming ability group and actively participated without overtly showing much enjoyment of the activity. Elisabeth appeared comfortable in the water, but showed that further development of her swimming skills was required. Other students were chatting and having fun, but Elisabeth who had moved away from the others, seemed to be disconnected from any social aspect of the swimming activity.

During break times I observed that Elisabeth was often isolated. I spoke with her class teacher who assumed that Elisabeth was starting to make connections within the classroom, but that it would a long time for these to develop and may even take a year. I inferred from this, the task of forming connections with others, was left entirely to her ability to have agency in the social world of her new school¹⁴.

¹⁴ See 'Supporting Inclusive School Practices' section of Chapter 2.

When I returned to the school to check my findings, an educator remarked to me, that during a lunch break, Elisabeth had been involved in an altercation with other African female students. She commented that she was surprised that Elisabeth had fought with them, as all the students were all 'African'. I questioned if assumptions such as this, further limited Elisabeth's ability to have agency in her new school environment, as she negotiated pathways to belonging.

Zaria

Zaria's presence in the schoolyard was in stark contrast to Elisabeth's. She appeared confident and was regularly surrounded by a culturally diverse group of students with whom she chatted and laughed easily. I grappled with understanding the differing perspectives of Zaria and Elisabeth as they interacted within their social world at school. Was the differing agency in their everyday school interaction due entirely to their personal characteristics? Was it due to Elisabeth's more recent arrival at the mainstream school?

Superficially the girls would appear to have much in common. They had both migrated from countries in Africa and had a sound mastery of English language. Through participating in the field I had opportunities to support the adage that 'appearances can be deceiving'.

Zaria has no memories of her home country or of the refugee camp that her family had moved to. Her memories of her lived experiences are of growing up in Australia. She was familiar with the values and meanings in her new local community long before she commenced school. Her journey and experience of pre and post migration sits in stark contrast to that of Elisabeth.

Yet, like Elisabeth, Zaria was new to Kurlu Primary School. She arrived at the school from a neighbouring mainstream school, a year before the research commenced. Her change of school was as a result of the family moving to a new house. Zaria did not attend an Intensive English Language Centre (IELC) before commencing school. Conversations with her revealed that her family spoke English confidently and that they did not consider it was necessary for her to go to an English learning centre.

According to Zaria, the main difference between her two schools was that she had found it 'easier to get along' with students at Kurlu Primary. She stated that the people at Kurlu had helped her settle in (teachers and students). Zaria liked swapping classes with the other research class for Mathematics and English, as it is, 'a taste of high school'. The practice of swapping classes she thought made it easier to keep friends and make new ones.

In her home classroom Zaria usually worked quietly on the set tasks although she was quite chatty during Mathematics lessons when she swapped to another classroom and teacher. Her class teacher commented that she had lacked confidence within the classroom earlier in the year, but had gained more confidence as the year had progressed. Within the classroom, Zaria did not contribute to discussions unless asked a direct question by the teacher. Despite her obvious popularity, Zaria was still settling in to a new school environment.

Zaria was a leader within her cohort of peers. Other students constantly pursued her both in and out of the classroom and students sometimes jostled to sit near her during lesson time. Zaria's mature and controlled manner gave the impression that she was well beyond her recorded chronological age. Several teachers within the school asked my opinion about Zaria's age. They wondered if Zaria was in fact older than her recorded age. I, unlike the teachers, had the time to go through student records and get

to know the contexts of the students. My previous examination of the participants' records had shown that many inconsistencies and errors had occurred on the enrolment forms, so it was a possibility that this may have occurred for Zaria. However, Zaria's parents both had a sound grasp of English and I found no anomalies on her enrolment form. I considered that her chronological age cited was correct.

Zaria was never alone. When watching Zaria's interactions in the playground she was often surrounded by a large group of female and male students of all backgrounds, including several participants of the research study. She interacted with them in games of chasey and netball/basketball. Participating in sporting activities, Zaria told me, was something she enjoyed doing. At other times Zaria could be seen sitting and talking with a large group of students on the edge of the oval.

Zaria appeared relaxed around me although she did not approach me and it was difficult to engage her in conversations in the classroom. During interviews, she eagerly interacted with me, gave full eye contact and sat comfortably in her chair. She talked about having a very large group of friends and told me that friendship was the most important thing for her at school. After school, Zaria often invited her friends to her house and they would sometimes also 'walk around the shopping centre' together. Zaria was confident within her group of friends and would go to them if she needed help at school.

FP: Whom can you go to if you need help at school?¹⁵

Z: I don't know. I don't really go to people when need help.

FP: Sometimes it is useful to tell someone when we have a problem.

Z: I'd go to my friends but sometimes they wouldn't know what to do.

¹⁵ All italicised text in the data indicates interviews between the participants and the researcher. Specific explanations, including the dates of data collection will be presented when relevant to the narrative. Further details may be obtained from the researcher upon request.

Last year Zaria had been a peer mediator. She did not continue in this role this year as she found it 'wasn't much fun'. Zaria seemed to find many things 'boring' or 'dull' including mathematics lessons. If she did not connect in some way with school activities and find meaning in them, she declared that they were 'boring'. Zaria expanded on why she did not enjoy Mathematics.

Z: Honestly I'd like the lessons to be more fun... Our Maths lessons are really boring. We are always doing writing in the book. It's dull.

FP: Does that make it hard to follow?

Z: Yes so most of the time I just talk.

FP: What would you see are characteristic of an interesting lesson?

Z: Because I'm a fan of music I'd like music in the lessons... musical maths questions.

FP: Something based on something that you can relate to?

Z: Yes. Lessons related to my interests.

FP: Do you find maths tricky?

Z: From Year 4, I found it hard.

Zaria confided to me that some other students had bullied her earlier in the year. It puzzled me as to why Zaria, who appeared to be popular, would have been bullied. I listened attentively as she recounted what had occurred.

Z: People would tease me. But not anymore! My friends would come and tell me. They teased me about my face about my nose, as it's bigger than everyone else's.

FP: Did you tell an adult?

Z: Yes I told the school counsellor and she dealt with it. It hasn't happened again.

Not only does the quote above explain the details of the bullying that Zaria experienced, but it also reveals her knowledge of and confidence in certain school structures. Zaria was pleased with the way in which the bullying incident had been handled. Quick action had been taken, the teasing had stopped and it had not occurred again. Zaria told me she believed bullying issues were dealt with well at the school. While outward appearances would suggest similarities between Elisabeth and Zaria,

these can be deceiving. Elisabeth was in the process of learning about how schooling operates, while Zaria was further down that path.

Daniel

“*Less racism*”, Daniel replied when I asked him about what he wished from school. He continued by explaining how this limited him.

- D: I would like to be able to bring what I want for lunch and not have the other children laugh at me.*
- FP: Don't you feel happy to do this now?*
- D: No. They (the other students) just laugh at me.*
- FP: What would you bring for lunch if you could?*
- D: African food.*

This conversation with Daniel had taken place near to the end of my time of participating at Kurlu School. Daniel had started to share his perceptions of his school world with me. His trust in me had gradually grown during my time at Kurlu.

Initially Daniel had not been open to including me in his school life. In the classroom he appeared to ignore me, avoided eye contact, and was quiet and tentative around me. However, when I asked him if he was interested in being a participant for the research he expressed interest. He willingly attended the small group gathering where the school counsellor and I had discussed the research with the potential participants¹⁶. This meeting provided a forum for students to ask questions or express opinions about the research. Daniel listened attentively, but was reluctant to talk. As the meeting came to a close and others began to leave, Daniel stayed behind and asked, “*Do we only have to say good things?*” I explained to him that I was interested in hearing anything he had to tell me about his experiences. Daniel blurted out quickly to me, “*Can I talk about bullying?*” I replied that I was interested in listening to any of his understandings of

¹⁶ See the ‘Recruitment of Participants’ section in Chapter 3.

school. With that Daniel stood up, collected the research forms to show to his parents, and hurried back to his classroom.

The school counsellor, who was with me in the small group situation, was surprised by Daniel's comments. He had not reported any incidents of bullying to her. I spoke to Daniel's class teacher about Daniel's comment and she was also unaware of Daniel's difficulties. Later that day, I asked the EALD teacher who worked with Daniel, if she has further information about Daniel's bullying assertion. She was quite confounded by Daniel's disclosure. The EALD teacher continued to say that she would be surprised if Daniel did volunteer to be a participant in the research. She claimed that he had had difficulties making connections with anyone since he had arrived at Kurlu School. She further commented the current support structures in place at Kurlu Primary, had limited the amount of time she now had to spend with Daniel and other SRE. This had restrained her ability to connect with Daniel.

Daniel had arrived at Kurlu School in 2009 and at the time of the study had been in Australia for six years. He had resettled in Australia with his mother and siblings and there was uncertainty at Kurlu School as to whether Daniel's father was also in Australia. Records indicated that CAHMS (Child and Adolescent Area Mental Health Services) were working with the family.

Since his arrival in Australia, Daniel had attended three schools. Two of these were IELCs (Intensive English Learning Centres). The documentation from the first IELC shows that when Daniel first arrived in Australia he had few English language skills and no previous experience with schooling. Interestingly, Daniel told me that he had attended four schools since arriving in Australia. This included starting at Kurlu, leaving to attend three separate IELCs and then returning to Kurlu Primary School. However, the records indicated that Daniel had only attended two IELCs. I suspected

that he had interpreted the question to include those schools that he may have visited. Daniel had taken my question very literally.

When Daniel had attended one IELC, the educators had expressed concerns about his lack of academic progress and his involvement in some behaviour infractions. He was recommended for and completed Speech and Guidance assessments. The report from the speech assessment was that Daniel was at an appropriate level at that time, for a student who only starting to learn English. Interestingly, an interpreter was not available in Daniel's first language for the speech assessment. Daniel's older sister, who was attending high school at the time, interpreted for the test. There were further complications with the test, as some of the English words in the test did not exist in Daniel's first language.

Daniel's teacher at the IELC had requested the Psychological Guidance assessment report as a result of his fine motor and concentration difficulties. However, the recommendations from this assessment were that his emotional state and lack of confidence were undermining his confidence in the classroom. This lack of confidence was seen to be the root of his school difficulties.

I noticed that Daniel often sat alone in the classroom at Kurlu with a slightly slumped posture. It became evident to me that he struggled with many aspects of his schoolwork. He seldom completed tasks and he rarely asked the teacher for any assistance. Daniel's reading was slow and he considered each word before he pronounced it. His difficulties with handwriting made it arduous for him to keep up in class activities. I further noticed Daniel's reticence to participate in activities when he changed classes from his home group to another class for Mathematics lessons. He struggled with the content and was reluctant to seek or accept assistance from the teacher or others. Daniel's main way of coping was to copy everything from the board.

He talked infrequently with his peers and would throw things if asked to share them with others. At one stage the Mathematics teacher invited the students to find a partner of the opposite gender to work with. Daniel remained seated until the teacher eventually partnered him with a female student.

In Drama lessons Daniel was also quiet and isolated himself from the other students. His class was learning a dance routine and Daniel sat solemnly while waiting for instructions. He participated when he was required to, but he kept his eyes downcast. This was in contrast to his participation during Physical Education lessons where he interacted and engaged enthusiastically in the activities. At break times too Daniel appeared to be more relaxed. On these occasions he formed part of a large group of students of whom Zaria was a central figure. Daniel played sports games and chatted with members of this group.

As my presence in the daily life of the school became more constant, it appeared to have more credence for Daniel. At times he would still avoid eye contact with me. However, one day, he boldly approached me in the corridor and asked me if I could contact his mother so that he could participate in the research. He said that she hadn't read the forms that he had taken home. As I had moved away from his classroom later that day, Daniel smiled and waved to me.

Over the course of my time at Kurlu School, Daniel opened up more and more to me as this trust grew. In my initial interview with him he was reluctant to talk. When he did, his offerings were brief. His posture was defensive with his arms crossed in front, his legs extended and his head bowed. He had provided only one-word answers to most questions.

FP: What do you like to do at school?

D: Chasey.

FP: What do you do after school?
D: Arndale.
FP: So you like to go to the shopping centre? What do you do there?
D: McDonalds.
FP: Whom would you go to if you had a problem at school?
D: Zaria.
FP: Do you play any after school sport?
D: Soccer, swimming and tennis
FP: Do you have any jobs that you do at home?
D: No.

I had reminded him at that time that he had requested to talk about being bullied. I suggested that it might be a good time to do that.

FP: Last time we talked with the school counsellor you told me that you had something that you wanted to talk to me about.
D: I just didn't want to talk about it today.

He rejected this opportunity, but offered some unexpected information. Daniel told me about other things that were concerning him.

D: I just don't want to talk about it as most people are dying in my family.
My mum's mum has died. My uncle has died. Lots of my family are dead.

Daniel explained that his grandmother's death had occurred recently in his family's country of first asylum and that his family were travelling back for the funeral.

D: My mum is going on Monday. They are all going.

As the interview concluded, Daniel became more vocal and discussed other members of his family who had died, including an uncle with whom he had had a close relationship. I listened quietly as he spoke. As we walked back to his classroom we chatted casually about the sports that he enjoyed playing. When we arrived back at class I said to let me know when he wanted to talk again and he replied, "*Maybe later - after lunch*".

Later that day, Daniel jumped up from his seat when seeing me and wanted to come with me immediately. He requested that the voice recorder not be switched on while we talked. Daniel was happy for me to take notes, but was fearful of being recorded. He told me about a group of older boys from another class, who were bothering him. This had been happening during all of last year, but had continued during the current year. He explained that the boys would call his name out loudly whenever he was near or if walked by and that they constantly sniggered and laughed at him. They also laughed at him when he was part of the group with Zaria. I questioned whether he thought the boys may be trying to befriend him and he retorted with a very loud “NO!”

Daniel hadn’t told anyone at school about the boys, but he had told his mother. She was going to move him to another school if it continued. I explained to Daniel that it was important for him to tell an adult in the school about it. I encouraged him to inform his class teacher. He was very reluctant for anyone to know, and he definitely did not want to go to anyone himself. Daniel eventually agreed that I could inform his class teacher. While talking with me, he emphasised that I must tell her of his fear of retaliation from the boys, both in the school grounds as well as outside, for he daily walked past one of their homes.

After disclosing his problem to me, Daniel continued to open up about his school experiences. In response to the question ‘If you had three wishes about school what would they be?’ he immediately replied that he wished for a school with less racism and less bullying.

D: Less racism.

D: Less bullying and teasing.

FP: Are you talking about the boys’ behaviour that you have just described?

D: Yes. And students teasing me about what I eat.

After this conversation Daniel explained about his previous experiences with bringing lunch.

I organised a time to meet with Daniel's class teacher to talk with her about the things that Daniel had told me. This included the older boys' behaviour, his mother's suggestion of changing his school and the deaths in his family. When talking with the teacher, she explained that she had noted Daniel's withdrawn behaviour in class. She had attributed this to his desire to 'fly under the radar' as he had many difficulties with his schoolwork. His teacher committed to 'keeping an eye on' the behaviour and to handling it in an effective, but sensitive manner. She understood his fear of retaliation. Unfortunately, Daniel's teacher had had little contact with Daniel's mother. She went on to say that many teachers in the school interpreted this lack of engagement from parents of students with refugee experience, as a lack of interest in their child's schooling. From her previous experience with people of refugee experience she did not agree with this sentiment.

I felt quite overwhelmed when I drove away from the school that day. I hoped desperately that my involvement had improved Daniel's school experiences and feelings of belonging at school and had not been detrimental. I was so relieved when I next went to his classroom and Daniel unexpectedly and enthusiastically, stood up from his seat and requested another interview with me. Interviews were providing Daniel with a means of talking to me confidentially.¹⁷ Talking confidentially was not always easy in a busy school like Kurlu. Daniel stressed that he really wanted to talk with me again and asked if we could play basketball after. His demeanour was in stark contrast to the initial interview that we had had. This time he was keen to have the recorder on. He sat up leaning forward in the chair, gave me full eye contact and was ready and eager to talk. We talked first about the situation with the older boys and I

¹⁷ See the 'Ethical Considerations' section in Chapter 3.

asked him whether things had improved for him. He replied that they had improved, "A little bit". He elaborated on this,

D: My mum said if it happens again she would come in and talk to my teacher. And if it happened still after that, she will take me to another school.

I was pleased to hear that Daniel's mother was now prepared to come up to school to meet with the teacher. He continued to discuss the harassment.

D: It is usually after Maths when they are all there. They say my name then laugh and then all walk off.

FP: It's good that you told me what was happening and that your teacher now knows about it. Last time we talked you said that you would go to Zaria if you had a problem.

Why didn't you tell her about the boys?

D: I don't know.

As our conversation continued, Daniel asked questions about my family, my previous teaching and me. He was interested in learning more about me, but was also now eager to talk about himself.

FP: What things would help you at school and help with your learning?

D: Like get a mentor who would sit with me and help me. School is fun but usually I am away.

Daniel was keen to tell me about his skills too;

D: I can speak five languages. My mum speaks fifteen languages.

After talking together, we went outside so that he could show me his skills with the basketball. He chatted happily to me about basketball and sport while he was shooting hoops.

During my remaining time in the school Daniel became increasingly friendly towards me. He asked me to attend the end of year classroom and school activities. On many

occasions he was keen to accompany me around the school and he always chatted comfortably with me. At one stage the teacher was encouraging this. Although I was keen to spend more time with Daniel I was concerned that he may become dependent on me¹⁸. This I considered was unfair to Daniel. I would be leaving the school at the end of the year and Daniel would be staying on without me.

I continued to interact casually with Daniel during my time at Kurlu and to support him if I was able to. Schoolwork was difficult for Daniel and he said that less work would improve school life for him. The next time I was present during a Mathematics lesson, Daniel asked me to sit with him and to assist him with his work. This was an appreciable indication of his trust in me. It was clear to me at this time that Daniel didn't really understand the mathematics that was being presented. I assisted him with the work and he wrote some solutions although he did not appear to understand the concepts. Significantly, when the teacher went through the Mathematics problems and asked for student input, Daniel put his hand up to offer some solutions. This was the first time over the term, that I had observed Daniel volunteer to answer a question in class. Daniel wanted to be involved in the classroom activities, but he required extra support to enable him to do this.

A close analysis of Daniel's records reinforced my premise that he required more assistance than was available to him. I found common threads amongst the end of semester reports such as 'he needs to complete his homework', 'he needs to persist and take risks,' and 'greater effort and persistence needed'. In the 'Skills for Success' section of the reports Daniel scored 'rarely' and 'sometimes' for confidence, persistence and managing time well. He scored 'often' for resilience. In most academic areas of Daniel's Mid-Year Report he scored a minimal or partial achievement. Only in

¹⁸ See the 'Ethical Considerations' section in Chapter 3.

Physical Education did he receive a satisfactory achievement. Daniel had told me that he played a lot of sport and that it was the thing he enjoyed most at school.

Towards the end of the term Daniel would often 'high-five' me in the classroom and chat confidently with me. The class teachers reported that he was more relaxed and comfortable in class since being involved in the research.

When I returned to the school in the New Year an extraordinary conversation occurred. Daniel's new teacher remarked on a recently arrived SRE who had joined the class. She commented that he was very withdrawn. Her surprise was obvious when I told her that the new student was behaving exactly as Daniel had done before the research commenced. The happy and confident way that Daniel now approached and chatted with me, and his 'easy' manner in class, had led her to surmise that he was a self-assured student. I explained to her later, in private, that Daniel had changed through the process of the research as he had gained trust in me and was able to share his experiences and tell his story.

Myat

Myat immediately made his presence known to me when I entered his classroom. It was the first time that I had met him. He promptly jumped up and found a seat next to me. A talkative, friendly, animated student, Myat disclosed a lot of information about himself to me within a very short amount of time. I noticed too, that his interactions with other students were relaxed and high-spirited. Myat confidently asked and answered questions of his peers and teacher. On my first occasion of meeting him, he chatted enthusiastically about his school and home experiences. He explained that he did not invite his school friends to his house after school or on weekends, as this was time he spent with his family. As I listened to him, I commented that he spoke English

well. He smiled and seemed pleased, but qualified that he had only been speaking English for a year. Myat further added that he did not speak English at home. In that first meeting Myat confidently shared many of his experiences with me. He enjoyed chatting and was eager to talk about himself!

During a subsequent conversation with Myat he talked freely about his schooling opportunities since arriving in Australia. He explained that he had attended two IELCs. His family's change of housing after resettlement in Australia had resulted in him changing to a second IELC. He had travelled by bus to that school. At the time of the study Myat had been at Kurlu Primary for three to four months. When asked if there were any differences between Kurlu and the last IELC (Gillman) he explained:

- M: At this school we have sport day and have fun.
At Gillman we didn't do hard work or go to thinking room.
I've been to thinking room one time, as I didn't understand the rules.
At Gillman we never get suspended and if we play handball and cheat we can just sit out, but not here.
More rules here.*
- FP: How are you enjoying being at your new school?*
- M: Gillman easier to get to know students; only have fifteen students. Now I have thirty-two.*
- M: It is easy to make friends here because they look after me (the other students).*
- M: Kurlu and Gillman are the best schools. Gillman 'cos we didn't do hard work.
We never go to thinking room if we made mistakes.
Kurlu is good because of soccer and we have fun.
When we finish work we have sport.*

Myat's conversation with me highlighted his trouble over learning the rules at Kurlu. He claimed he was learning them 'as I go'. Rules were easier for Myat to understand at his previous IELC where they were explained slowly, often and thoroughly.

His conversation turned to talking about his initial introduction to his classmates, at Kurlu Primary. He had found it an embarrassing experience.

- FP: What was it like coming to the new school?*
M: Go to the class and they stand in front of the class and get embarrassed.
FP: What may have helped you?
M: Make it happy. Having fun times.
When I came I was in room and then I went to my room and I was embarrassed.
Then we had PE and I got to know people.
FP: What has helped you to get to know the other students?
M: Sit together with them (my friends) and talk. We are allowed to talk. Sometimes we are not allowed to.
A lot harder if can't talk.

Attending other lessons such as Drama, Physical Education (P.E.) and Greek had also helped him to get to know the other students. Myat thought this was because he had more opportunities in these classes to talk and to mix with the students in the class.

Friendships were important to him and he said he would be afraid to move into another class if he was unaccompanied by his friends.

- M: I feel okay about next year.*
But, if when I go to other class and my friends not there I going be scared too, so scared.
If my friends are there I not scared.

He went on to explain what had helped him to make friends at school.

- M: When I sit together and can talk with them (it helps me).*
When I first came they (the other students) didn't talk and I didn't know what to do and I am scared of asking people.
Then I get to talk to people (when in group situations).

Myat claimed that swapping classes for English and Mathematics had also aided friendship making by provided opportunities for him to get to know other school members. He had a firm group of friends at Kurlu including one of the participants for the research, who was in the other class. Friends and soccer made school a happy place for him.

- FP: What are the best things about school?*
M: Friends and soccer.

- FP: What do you like to do with your friends at school?*
M: Play soccer or walk around or handball if it is hot. I just want to play soccer every day.

Despite Myat's apparent fluency with conversational English he had struggled with the more formal English used in class at Kurlu Primary.

- M: At Gillman we didn't use technical words they just used not technical words.
And here they use technical words and I don't know what they mean.
Hardest thing.*

Myat stressed that someone to assist him regularly with English language skills would be a big help to him at school. He was a conscientious student who was keen to excel at his schoolwork. When he found work difficult or lacked confidence to complete a task he responded positively to directions and assistance given by teachers and classmates. I came to know Myat as someone who would persist until he achieved a result with which he was satisfied. He wanted to learn and to be successful at school, but he required the necessary school structures and policies in place to support him.

Characteristic of all the student participants, Myat showed persistence, and a desire to be successful and belong at school. On one occasion, during my participation in Myat's classroom, I saw him uncharacteristically, become confused and troubled. He had been asked by the teacher to choose one friend to help him with a classroom activity. Myat put his hands on his head and lowered his head onto the desk. He looked very sad. His teacher then realised that he did not want to single anyone out from his group of friends, so she chose for him. Friendship was important to Myat. He had not been at Kurlu for very long and his friendships were still tenuous.

Friendships at school were important to all the SRE participants. They all nominated their friends as a source of support should they have a problem at school. Myat's comments to me echo this view.

FP: Who would you go to if you had a problem at school?

M: Anyone.

FP: Would you be comfortable to go to anyone at the school?

M: Not comfortable, but a little bit comfortable. First go to my friends and then my teacher.

In or out of the classroom, Myat was friendly and talkative with me. He appeared to enjoy being interviewed and was happy for interviews to be recorded. His body language reflected his enthusiasm as he sat leaning forward, gave firm eye contact and eagerly answered any questions. Myat's quiet speaking voice made it difficult at times to hear him and also to record his answers.

In the classroom I watched the slightly 'cheeky' and attention seeking behaviour of Myat. He seemed to be seeking approval from his peers: seeking ways to build his capital as a popular student. On one occasion, during a Drama lesson, I watched and listened as he acted the 'class clown', by walking jauntily around the room and disturbing others. He continued to do this despite being instructed by the teacher to sit down. In his home classroom too I noted him exploring and trying out different (and sometimes conflicting) school 'rules' or 'ways of doing schooling'. In this search for connection with his peers, Myat encountered a problem.

Over the term he had become very friendly with a student with what teachers would call, 'significant behavioural complexities'. He, along with his companion, broke an important school rule. It appeared to me that Myat was a young person exploring the complexity of school structures and searching for belonging. He was issued with two behaviour 'tickets' resulting in 'time outs' at lunch. The teacher spoke confidentially

and extensively to him about the behaviour infringements. I noticed that he was visibly distressed when he returned to the classroom.

Later that day, his teacher shared her concerns with me, about Myat. She considered his behaviour was the result of his need to be popular amongst his peers. Of concern to her also was the likely outcome of Myat taking the 'tickets' home. As this was part of the school behaviour management procedure implemented to keep parents informed, it was a school expectation. She was reluctant to follow through with this policy if Myat was likely to be 'hit'. The teacher commented that this had happened previously with another student of refugee experience. Myat's parents had not been into the school since the day of enrolment and were not contactable by phone due to their difficulties with English language¹⁹. It was unfortunate that home-school links had not been established for Myat. Building communication links with Myat's parents was essential so that opportunities for mutual understandings could develop.

Through my conversations with Myat I came to understand how much life had changed for him. His previous experiences with technology, and particularly computers, had been very limited. He talked enthusiastically about using the computer at home now.

- M: In my country I didn't use computer.
Only when we walked to town. It took hours to get there.
In town they have cars.*
- M. To use computer go to where you pay money and you can use
computer.*
- M: I like Australia better 'cos we don't (didn't) have microwave or
gas.
Only cook in fire (in my home country). Easier for mum here.*
- M: In my home we had a dog and a horse. The dog and horse are
dead. We had chickens.
Only 500 people in my village.
In town more people, 1000 or 5000.
We went to town for 2 or 3 week then to other country (country
of transition). We stayed in there for three years. And they teach*

¹⁹ See 'Valuing and Including Parents and Families' section in Chapter 2.

me to write. If I didn't know then (English) it very hard to come here (to school).

There were many people from Myat's home country living with them in the transition country. He described how his father had left the family four years previous to the rest of the family, to get money and to learn the language of the country (of transition). In total, Myat's father had lived in the country of transition for seven years. Significantly, Myat volunteered that he has no desire to ever return to his home country.

*M: One thing about my country.
If you get trouble there is no police there is no rules in my country.
If you get trouble every day and night there is no police.
There are no rules.
Then they fight.
They drunk and fight.
My family are safe in Australia.
I would not go back to my country, but I would go to other country (country of transition).
In that country there were half rules.*

When I returned to Kurlu Primary the following year to complete member checking²⁰, I discovered that Myat had moved schools. This was possibly as a result of his family's search for more affordable accommodation. I reflected on my conversations with Myat and I remembered him expressing his fear of being separated from his friends. The EALD teacher viewed housing mobility and the resulting transiency of families,²¹ (a common issue for people of refugee experience) as a major disruption for SRE. This had now caused further complications for Myat, as he searched for stability and a sense of belonging at school. I wondered how he was faring in his new school environment and I hoped that he was doing well.

²⁰ See the 'Data Analysis Methods' section of Chapter 3.

²¹ See the 'Valuing and Including Parents and Families' section of Chapter 2.

Jamin

Jamin's father, Milarepa, sat waiting for me in the school office foyer. He greeted me politely when I introduced myself, but his face lit up with a wide smile when the interpreter introduced himself to him in his home language. It had been necessary to seek the assistance of an interpreter for this interview as Milarepa was still developing his English language skills. A fellow research student at the university had volunteered to interpret. Milarepa explained that his need to attend English classes during school hours had made it difficult for him to regularly attend his children's school, but that he had taken the day off for the interview. He was the only parent of a student participant with whom I was able to meet. My conversation with Milarepa offered me insights and understandings into the complexities faced by people of refugee experience when resettling in another country.²²

Milarepa told me that Jamin had transitioned into Kurlu Primary mid way through the year that the research took place. He explained that since arriving in Australia, Jamin and his brothers had attended three IELC schools as well as Kurlu Primary. Later, when talking with Jamin, I gained a sense of his school experiences in Australia.

FP: Explain any differences between the school that you are at now and your first schools in Australia.

J: Students here are good.

FP: Was it hard to get to know people at this school?

J: Not hard here 'cos I came to visit here. When I came to visit I make a friend.

FP: Is this one of the friends that you have now?

J: Yes.

FP: What are the best things about school?

J: Learning. I like the teachers because they are friendly.

At the first school (IELC) that Jamin had attended there had been many people from his home country and he had found that helpful. However, Jamin was clear to express that

²² See the 'Valuing and Including Parents and Families' section in Chapter 2.

he had enjoyed attending all of the schools in Australia including Kurlu. He commented that he likes 'every subject' at Kurlu Primary.

- J: In my first school used to be people from my home country.
When I go there first I didn't know English so my friend helped me.*
- FP: Did your friend speak your language?*
- J: Yes.*
- J: This school they do lots of assignment here.
In here I learn new things.
At other schools mostly English.*

However, school expectations over homework had caused problems for Jamin after his arrival in Australia. He found it burdensome to complete homework, without extra assistance. The EALD teacher commented that a family's ability to support with homework was dependent on their cultural background and on what was being set. She further explained, "*If they do not understand what is happening in class then they can't complete the homework*". When I was talking with Milarepa, he elaborated on this point and explained that no-one at their home had the skills to assist the boys who were at primary school.²³ Jamin remarked that he had had issues with completing homework in his home country too.

- J: In school in my home country they used to hit kids with sticks every day.
I would forget to do homework.
No-one would help me (at home).
My mum didn't know how to read. So I got hit every day.
Hit on my hand. It hurt.*
- FP: Did you know teachers in Australia didn't use sticks before you came to Australia?*
- J: My cousin tell me before we came.*

Jamin told me that he had enjoyed school more in Australia than he did in his home country. He especially enjoyed the opportunities to use technology that were not available to him before. However, an issue for him in school in Australia has been to

²³ This point is explored in the 'Valuing and Including Parents and Families' section of Chapter 2.

understand school rules. Jamin described a problem that he had at his last IELC. Even now he is unsure what rule he had broken on that day.

- FP: Has it been hard for you to understand the rules at school?*
J: Yep.
FP: Do you think that you know all the rules now?
J: Not really understand.
FP: Who do you ask about the rules if you are not sure?
J: My friends and teacher.
FP: Was it easier for you to understand the rules at the other schools you have been to in Australia?
J: No.
FP: Were the rules explained to you at the other schools?
J: Yeah.
FP: Have you had any difficulties at school because you are unsure of the rules?
J: At last school (IELC) I don't know what happened. My friend made me in trouble and they had to call my parent. I don't know why.

Of great assistance to Jamin when transitioning from his IELC to Kurlu, had been the day he visited the school. This had provided him with an opportunity to form some friendships. He discussed this with me and also talked about the value of being involved in group work.

- FP: Have any activities helped you to make friends at school?²⁴*
J: When play with them.
FP: Are there any activities in the classroom that help with getting to know the other students?
J: Like maths and science.
FP: How have these subjects helped you?
J: We be in the group.
FP: Would it be more difficult to get to know the other students if you didn't do group work?
J: Yes. If you couldn't talk. Would be harder.

In the classroom Jamin was a quiet student who did occasionally chatter to friends. Despite his quiet demeanour, Jamin appeared confident with a small group of his peers. During lesson time he watched intently as the teacher spoke and gave directions and explanations, but he did not volunteer to answer any questions. He was wary of

²⁴ See Semi-Structured Interview section in Chapter 3 for further information on the complexity of interviews with SRE.

me, but not unfriendly and chatted to me on a few occasions. When it was time for Jamin to complete tasks he leaned low over his work. On one occasion as I walked by Jamin I noticed that he had done very little of a set activity. This instance was during a mathematical lesson and I suspected that Jamin did not have a sound knowledge of the times tables that was needed. While participating in the class I had noticed several other students referring to the back of their exercise books where the tables were printed. Building trust with Jamin had been slow so I intervened casually by directed him to the back of the book. When I was next nearby to him, I noticed that he had moved forward with the task. I had been surprised that Jamin had not put his hand up to seek assistance from the teacher during this lesson. I suspected at that time that Jamin's lack of proficiency with English or his lack of confidence, as a new class member may have been the reason for this.

In a small group situation Jamin appeared more out-going and confident. It was not unusual to see him talking freely and loudly with his group members when working on the creative group task for the end of year assembly. He introduced his group members to me as his best friends and commented that they all liked cricket. Jamin's best friends all had a similar cultural background to him. He clarified that he had first met them on his visit day from the IELC. Jamin talked about his friends.

FP: What do you like to do with your friends at school?
J: Handball and cricket. I only see my friends at school.
I have other friends from other schools.
I see my other friends on weekends.
They are from my home country.

I was offered further insights into Jamin's many school changes when talking with his father. Milarepa explained how the family had been forced to relocate several times as they sought affordable accommodation and a place where they felt connected to others. At one stage the family had moved to a southern area where the family had

experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness. The family were so unhappy that despite having free accommodation they had moved house again.

Talking with Milarepa helped me make sense of the family's frequent house and resulting school moves. Finding a sense of connection in the community in which they lived was important for all the family. For this reason, the family would again be moving in the following year. The impending move would result in them living near to Jamin's uncle and other families from their home country. It would be Jamin's fifth school move since arriving in Australia. When listening to Milarepa, it was apparent to me, how important it is for parents to develop their own pathways to belonging within their host country. He illustrated this with a story from his own experience of early arrival. Often when travelling by bus, he would squash his cap down as low over his face as he could and bend his head towards the floor, so that no one would talk to him. He explained that it was fear that had made him do this – fear of not understanding the cultural norms and fear of not comprehending the spoken English. Cultural norms were also partly responsible for his lack of attendance at his children's school. He clarified that in his home country parents did not become involved in their children's schooling and were not welcomed at the school. Subsequent interviews with Jamin supported this.

FP: In your home country did your parents go up to your school often?

*J: No. Not at all.
They have to do the jobs.
To get the money.*

In the classroom I noticed when talking with Jamin, that sometimes he did not fully understand what I was saying. He spoke hesitatingly when asking or answering questions. I was unsure whether this was due to his developing English language skills. I asked him about his confidence with English and he explained that his family were all

learning to speak in English. Jamin had completed some basic schooling in English skills within the refugee camp.

J: We had the book to learn English with all the questions and you had to put answer.

He commented that he didn't really understand the book and couldn't really speak or understand English before coming to Australia.

FP: When you came to Australia did you know how to speak English?

J: No.

FP: Did your dad know any English when he came?

J: No.

FP: Does your Mum speak English?

J: My mum the same like my Dad. She is studying (English). Everyone is studying in our house.

FP: Do you sometimes have trouble understanding words in class?

J: Yes.

FP: What do you do if you have trouble understanding the words?

J: Nothing or I ask my friends.

FP: Whom can you go to if you need help at school?

J: I didn't have problem.

FP: But, one day, you may have a problem and you may need someone to talk to about it. Who could you go to?

J: Principal or school counsellor.

I talk to my friends and if they say no I ask the teacher.

Just as Myat had done, Jamin had nominated his friends as his first support should he have a problem at school. It highlights the importance for SRE of establishing trusting relationships with others at school.

My initial impression that Jamin's reticence to talk in class may be due to his inadequacies with English language skills, was not entirely correct. Milarepa revealed some illuminating information when I talked with him. He described a speech impediment that Jamin had had since birth. He expounded on Jamin's difficulties detailing how Jamin had stuttered even in his first language. Jamin's teacher was surprised by the information and thought that it was most likely a contributing factor to Jamin's hesitancy in class. I found it quite alarming to think, that if I had not been

able to contact the parents and to seek an interpreter that this information may have taken even longer to surface. Jamin's ability to talk confidently has had, and would continue to have, effects on his ability to make connections with others in his search for belonging.

Jamin was excited about the following year and was not worried about moving into a new class or to a new school. He explained proudly that he is currently a peer mediator at the current school and that he runs activities for other students in the school during break times. Jamin confidently modelled his group's costume to a large audience, at the end of year assembly. Despite Jamin's speech difficulties he had started to form some connections at the school. I hoped that when he moved to his new school he would be able to accomplish this again. Jamin's wishes for the future show his resilience, enthusiasm and optimistic outlook, common qualities of all the SRE participants.

*J: I want to be champion. And learn everything.
Like being principal.*

CHAPTER 5: RE-PRESENTING THE DATA

DEVELOPING PATHWAYS TO BELONGING

When things fall apart, the children of the land scurry and scatter like birds escaping a burning sky... They will never be the same again because you cannot be the same once you leave behind who and what you are, you just cannot be the same... Look at them leaving in droves, despite knowing they will be welcomed with restraint in those strange lands because they do not belong.

NoViolet Bulawayo (2013)

Children with experience as refugees enter their new host country full of hope. When they transition to mainstream school, they face particular and particularly difficult challenges. These challenges in turn present schools (in their culture, structures and practices) with different demands and responsibilities. Such challenges may restrain the welcome that SRE receive at mainstream school and the welcome might not be fully and generously given. The development of pathways to belonging affects both the school and the student, for in the act of welcoming the stranger, the welcomer, himself or herself, changes.

The journey of resettlement may find SRE struggling to hang on to where they came from, as they search for directions to where they are going - a struggle of acculturation tensions. These tensions can be exasperated when they transition into mainstream school and confront boundaries to belonging. Such boundaries may create divisions of 'them' and 'us' (see Chapter 2, Literature Review; Rutter, 2006 and Yuval-Davis, 2011) making belonging problematic for SRE. This is a pertinent issue for students as developing pathways to belonging in mainstream school is vital for students who have left so much behind them, including their known way of being. For creating pathway to

belonging to school will not only provide openings for SRE into the culture of mainstream school, but also into the wider social world of their new country.

When students enter Kurlu Primary School they are immersed in a school with a rich history of supporting migrant students from many countries. This continues to the present day. However, the current student population of newly arrived migrants is increasingly represented by a different kind of student. Not only do they have experience as refugees, but they also have lived in refugee camps. Indeed some have been born in these camps. Each student of refugee experience brings to school their own journey and experiences of migration. As Keddie & Niesche (2012) and Rutter, (2006) remind us in Chapter 1 (The Introduction) these students are not a homogenous group, as their backgrounds, experiences and personalities have shaped them uniquely. However, all students have moved to Australia, with their families, with the hope of a better life and a desire to belong.

As detailed in Chapter 3, (The Methodology) this research has been framed by three analytical categories: school culture, structures and practices. They have informed the methodological design of the research and provided the conceptual means to analyse the data. Osterman's (2000) study of school belonging (referred to in Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis) draws attention to the importance of these three categories for developing school belonging and warns us that "[u]nfortunately, many of the changes necessary to satisfy students' needs for belongingness involve drastic changes in the cultural values, norms, policies, and practices that dominate schooling..." (p. 360).

This chapter will discuss school belonging for SRE with a focus on school culture, structure and practice bringing together voices of students and the broader literature. The research aims to open windows to understandings of the complexities SRE face when making pathways to belonging in mainstream Australian schooling. It is intended

that through these windows, educators and policy makers can be informed of how to provide genuine opportunities for belonging for SRE. The remainder of this chapter is structured by the categories 'Culture' 'Structure' and 'Practice'.

Culture

From the data analysis (expounded in Chapter 3), six themes emerged as significant features of school culture influencing school belonging for SRE. These are;

Understanding the refugee journey; Knowing the student of refugee experience;

Promoting a culture of belonging; Valuing and including parents and families;

Challenging existing views and Building on English language skills. These will be

discussed separately, but it is important to acknowledge that they are not separate

entities and interact as cultural influences on how belonging to school may be

facilitated.

Understanding the Refugee Journey

Families of the student participants had moved to Australia from a variety of home countries, due to their fear of persecution and a need to seek safety. Some families had experiences of dislocation, trauma, war and violence. It has been brought to our attention in Chapter 2 (see Murray, et. al., 2008 and Whiteman, 2005) that the disparity of cultures of recently migrated students may result in them being pressured to recreate who they are in a new cultural surrounding. Developing understandings of these disparate journeys to resettlement is imperative for fostering belonging for SRE in mainstream school.

The student participants had disparate stories of resettlement. For example Jamin was born in a refugee camp in Asia and associated the refugee camp with memories of

home. He had only recently moved to Australia at the time of the study. In contrast, Zaria moved with her family into a refugee camp in Africa at a very young age. She migrated to Australia when she was about 3 years old. Zaria had few memories of her life previous to settlement in Australia. This was different for Myat. He had fled with his family from his home country in Asia to a refugee camp, and he had memories and experiences of both his home country (including unrest) and of the refugee camp. In Daniel's case it was difficult to ascertain either from talking with him or from reading school records, the exact time that his family had left his home country in Africa. However, he spoke about his longing for his home country and for his country of first asylum.

These journeys were unique and as discussed in Chapter 2, support Matthews' (2008) view of the importance of not generalising when using the term 'refugee'. Additionally, the disparity of cultures and the diversity of journeys to safety for the participants, had resulted in differing acculturation tensions for them, an important issue for students previously identified in Chapter 1, by Milner & Khawaja, (2010). Existing acculturation tensions influenced the students' capacity to have agency and to develop cultural capital (see Chapter 3, Block, 2013) within mainstream school.

The participants' previous schooling experiences prior to resettlement were also dissimilar. This influenced their ability to connect with the culture of mainstream school. It was highlighted in Chapter 2, by Miller et al., (2005), that the pre-migration schooling experiences of students are an important influence on a student's ability to connect to the culture of mainstream school in their resettled country. The student participants had differing schooling experiences prior to arrival in Australia. Jamin had completed some schooling in his first country of asylum, however, this was very limited. He was taught from a book that he did not understand, corporal punishment was used and he was taught minimal English skills. However, Myat had experienced

some schooling in English in the refugee camp and considered that this was of great assistance to him. He commented to me²⁵ that he would not have coped in Australian mainstream school without this skill. Daniel's documents confirm that he had no previous schooling before arriving in Australia. I found him to be the student participant who appeared to be having the greatest difficulties making connections at school. Contrastingly, Zaria had completed all of her schooling thus far in Australia and she appeared to have the least problems forming supportive networks with others.

Appreciating the diverse experiences of SRE post-migration (as well as pre-migration) was recognised in Chapter 2 (see Whiteman, 2005) as important for the schooling of SRE. Notes from Daniel's first IELC indicate that he had struggled with the academic and social requirements of his initial Australian schooling. The recommendations for a Psychological guidance test and a Speech pathology test²⁶ at the IELC signify a concern from his teachers, over both his social and academic progress. He was the only student participant who had been recommended for these types of tests early after his arrival in Australia. Yet post-migration issues discussed in Chapter 2 may explain many of the concerns about Daniel's school progress expressed at the IELC. These include his lack of previous schooling and the acculturation tensions he was experiencing. Additionally, difficulties in Daniel's home environment, as documented in his IELC records, created complications for him²⁷.

Knowing the Student of Refugee Experience

The complex normative, multicultural nature of the research school population resulted in many pupils of refugee experience being indistinguishable within the culture of the school. It was established in Chapter 2, that gaining knowledge and

²⁵ See Chapter 4 for this conversation with Myat.

²⁶ See further information about Daniel's tests in Chapter 4.

²⁷ See Chapter 4 for further explanation of the post-migration difficulties that Daniel faced.

awareness of students may enable educators to reflect on their own biases and beliefs. This, in turn, might enable educators to take affirmative action steps for SRE in their new school.²⁸ The work of Due & Riggs (2010) and Apple, (2011), discussed in Chapter 2, emphasises the importance of educators gaining knowledge and awareness of SRE. They see this as a vital step for the successful schooling experiences of SRE at school in their host country. It is therefore vital that SRE are identified, but not labelled, within the culture of the school²⁹.

The student participants in this research had moved from a wide variety of countries, ethnic groups and cultural ways of knowing. As previously highlighted in Chapter 2 this is as an important consideration when facilitating pathways to belonging. The participants constituted a small, yet heterogeneous group of students. They were from four home countries, identified with four separate cultures and each student spoke a unique first language. However, all participants had spent time in refugee camps. Most participants spoke an additional language from their first country of transition and some spoke even more languages or dialects. The stage of acculturation varied between the students. Their process of transition into their new environment was (as Kennan et al. 2011, stressed in Chapter 1) complex, and therefore, influenced their ability to form pathways to belonging in mainstream school.

One of the complexities of transition for SRE was the move from rural and less technological cultures, to the advanced technological culture of a big city. This was illustrated by comments students made on the modern technologies now available to them. Jamin, Myat and Daniel had experienced, previous to migration, limited opportunities to use computers and other modern technologies. Myat's comments regarding his former rural life in his home country without cars, electricity, gas and

²⁸ See Hale et al. (2008) in Chapter 2.

²⁹ See Chapter 3 for further information on difficulties with identifying the participants.

computers,³⁰ highlight the relevance of this aspect of acculturation for him. His comment that it was much easier for his mum now to cook with gas, rather than on a fire, reminds us just how much his life, his cultural ways of knowing and his worldviews may have changed and been challenged since resettlement. Learning about students' experiences, families, beliefs, skills, values, cultures and challenges to their worldviews, is essential, in order that educators may best support students (as emphasised in Chapter 2 by Due et al., 2010). Such knowledge promotes belonging for SRE in mainstream school by cultivating empathy, awareness and understanding.

The importance of knowing the students was illustrated with Jamin's move to mainstream school. Jamin presented as a quiet and compliant student who was part of a small group of friends. He attempted his schoolwork and did not display behavioural problems. In contrast to Daniel, Jamin had not been recommended for speech assessment at any of the three IELCs that he had attended or at his current mainstream school. Yet, unlike Daniel, Jamin did have a significant speech difficulty.³¹ This was important knowledge about Jamin that counted in part for his reluctance to talk in class and was affecting his ability to connect to the culture of mainstream school. Once armed with this knowledge, teachers were able to take some affirmative action steps for Jamin.³²

Promoting a Culture of Belonging

Developing a sense of belonging to school has been established in Chapter 1 and 2 as an essential need that is important for all students. It has been emphasised (Chapter 2) that for SRE the development of belonging to school is a critical need and one that

³⁰ See Chapter 4 for this conversation with Myat.

³¹ See conversations with Milarepa in Chapter 4.

³² In Chapter 4, the steps taken after this difficulty was revealed have been explained.

requires addressing. Belonging to school for SRE requires that students feel connected, develop friendships and foster strong teacher-student relationships.

I became very aware of the importance of developing feelings of belonging through my own experience as ‘the newcomer’ at the school when conducting the research. I had entered a school site where I was unknown and it was essential for me to initially develop some relationships with the adults in the school so that I might successfully conduct the research. I was concerned about how I would be received and at times felt that I was regarded as ‘the other’ and an inconvenience in the chaotic landscape of a complex school site.

My own feelings of ‘not belonging’ caused me to reflect on how difficult it must be for SRE to develop pathways to belonging to school. I was a middle-aged, university educated, Caucasian woman in my home country. I spoke English confidently and through years of experience teaching in South Australian primary schools, I understood the schooling system well. The research participants had arrived and entered mainstream school at year levels that were age appropriate. They had varying competencies with English, differing understandings of ‘schooling’ and were experiencing a range of acculturation concerns (see Chapters 1 & 2). Developing belonging to school was a diversified process for students. The influence of loss of country and possibly loved ones changes to their ways of knowing and understanding their world, and changes to their family situation including poverty, had a profound effect on them. As we have seen with the work of Correa-Velez et al. (2010) (in Chapters 1 and 2) participants were transitioning into so many new aspects of their lives and were constantly required to move between their home culture and the culture of Australian mainstream school. Building connections with others and developing friendships was essential for them.

Friendships were indicated by Zaria as an important element of schooling. Zaria was successful at forming friendships and related well with the adults in the school. Her resettlement at such a young age had resulted in her largely identifying with Australian culture. Zaria was the only participant student who invited friends to her house after school. There may be many contributing factors that explain Zaria's social confidence. These could include her family's socio-economic standing and confidence with English language skills and her decreased level of acculturation tensions due to resettlement at an earlier time and at a very young age. As noted earlier in the thesis, Lewig et al. (2009) highlight these factors and others as potential causes of tension after resettlement³³. The capability for Zaria to invite friends to her house after school provided an opportunity for her to further cement friendships that had been cultivated in school hours. Zaria was an active agent in her search for belonging in mainstream school culture.

There was a disparity between Zaria's development of pathways to belonging and Elisabeth's observed inability to make connections with others. Zaria had a sound grasp of the way that the school culture was constructed. Her ability to make quick connections with other students displayed powerful knowledge that Elisabeth was lacking. However Zaria's experiences, as a minority group student, and her inability at times to relate to the curriculum are important factors that had affected her pathways to belonging at her new school.

Initial friendships were formed quickly for Jamin, with a few students who identified with a similar place in the world from where he had immigrated. Common backgrounds, interests and similarities had enabled these friendships to thrive, a point accentuated in Chapter 2 by Fehr (1996). Jamin commented that he had enjoyed

³³ See Chapter 2 for further details on the tensions of resettlement.

attending his first IELC in Australia where there had been a large population of students from his home country.

Friendship-making appeared difficult for Daniel. Along with Zaria, he represented a visibly different 'other' in the multicultural mix of the school. I observed Elisabeth to also struggle to make connections with others. Her habit of spending time with her sister appeared to be created out of need, not out of preference (see Chapter 4).

Initially Daniel kept very much to himself, but would mix with Zaria and her large predominately female group of friends at break times. He counted Zaria as his friend.

Making connections with others is important for all students, so they can feel supported and that they belong at school and it might be critical for SRE (see Chapter 2). Understandings drawn from my time in the school, suggest that SRE require assistance when attempting to form friendships and positive relationships within mainstream school. Such assistance can alleviate the gap between 'them' and 'us' that may exist in mainstream school, an issue of power dynamics highlighted in Chapter 2. When unaided to form partnerships or small groups, SRE may be excluded as was observed with Elisabeth and Daniel.³⁴ This could further isolate students. In Chapter 2, this issue was accentuated by Riggs and Due (2010), who found friendship-making is especially hard for SRE who might not know or understand "the rules for engagement" (p. 73).

A friendship group grew quickly for Myat, shortly after he commenced mainstream school. Myat's prior skills with English and schooling and his out-going personality may have facilitated friendship-making for him. However, despite being part of a group of friends, Myat continued to search for pathways to belonging at mainstream school and he made some mistakes along the way. Myat actively drew attention to himself in

³⁴ Examples of these exclusions are given in Chapter 4.

an attempt to be noticed by others. His behaviour was in contrast to his conscientiousness with his schoolwork and his desire to succeed academically. He ventured down a pathway to belonging that at times procured a few twists and turns as he negotiated the social environment of the school. The resulting difficulties that Myat experienced³⁵ directly support the findings of Baumeister & Leary (1995) and Demanet and Van Houtte (2011) discussed in Chapter 2, that a lack of belonging for students might result in behavioural problems. The concepts of habitus and cultural capital are important here (explained in Chapters 2 & 3). Myat's search for cultural capital in the habitus of mainstream school had resulted in some negative consequences for him.

Daniel had a firm friendship with Zaria yet he struggled to belong at school. As I participated in school life I regularly listened to and talked with Daniel. I discovered that the more time I spent with him the more Daniel allowed me into his social world and communicated his thoughts and feelings to me. As the research period drew to an end, teachers within the school commented on the change in Daniel's behaviour and demeanour. Since his involvement in the research, they claimed that he was happier, and more relaxed. The EADL teacher in the school believed that having time to establish a trusting relationship with me had provided a positive conduit for Daniel. A relationship of trust, built between Daniel and me, had allowed him to have a voice, tell his story and be 'truly' heard.³⁶

Valuing and including Parents and Families

An essential step towards pathways to belonging for SRE is to establish meaningful communication between home and school. This has value for both students and

³⁵ Details of these difficulties are described in Chapter 4.

³⁶ This was established in Chapter 2, by Due, et al. (2014), as vitally important for belonging for SRE.

families as suggested in Chapter 2, by Woods, (2009). Complications that I experienced, when attempting to secure meetings with parents/caregivers of students for informed consent, alerted me to the dearth of SRE parental engagement at Kurlu primary. I was fortunate to interview Milarepa, Jamin's father,³⁷ who disclosed to me, some of the obstacles to participation for parents of SRE. His experiences were consistent with the literature presented in Chapter 2 ³⁸ where possible hindrances to participation were identified. These included work and home commitments, unfamiliarity with Australian schooling, cultural difference in expectations of schooling, difficulties with English language and health and social issues of families. My reflections on the paucity of SRE parental involvement found me questioning the capacity of students to navigate the cultural gap, between home and school that leaves them with two possibly contradictory views of the world.

It is essential for sound communication to be built between SRE families and mainstream school. Without ongoing interactions between families and students in primary school, miscommunications and difficulties may arise. Daniel's reluctance to tell anyone at the school of the harassment he had been facing for a year and half ³⁹ had meant that he had continued to be harassed. When he had informed his mother about the bullying this had not resulted in any communication of the grievance to the school. Instead, Daniel's mother promised him that she would move him to another school if the harassment continued. After I conveyed his concerns to his class teacher a bridge was built between home and school. Subsequently Daniel's mother connected with the class teacher to talk about Daniel. This was a positive step forward for Daniel and his family and it reinforced the importance of clear communication between home and school.

³⁷ See conversations with Milarepa in Chapter 4.

³⁸ See Lewig et al. (2009); King (2013); Rutter (2001) and Tadesse (2014) in Chapter 2, regarding issues of school participation for parents.

³⁹ See Chapter 4 for further information on the harassment Daniel experienced.

An additional transition issue for families; housing transiency, was presented in the research by Forrest et al. (2012) in Chapter 2. Frequent house moves after resettlement, from community to community, may be made as parents seek affordable housing and a place where they feel they belong. Movement between houses may have a profound effect on a family's ability to form connections in their local community, including the school. It is also influential on a student's ability to developing pathways of belonging to school. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the EALD teacher saw transiency as a major barrier to SRE making successful connections to their school. Daniel, Myat and Jamin had each attended three or more schools since arriving in Australia. On my return visit to the school, Myat and Jamin had both moved schools once again.

Parents may have additional difficulties being involved with their child's schooling if barriers to inclusion exist. These include language and cultural barriers, racism, loss of social identity and networks and acculturation tensions⁴⁰. Of importance, is that Daniel's teacher thought that some teachers at the school interpreted the lack of attendance of parents of SRE at school, as disinterest in their child's education (discussed in Chapter 4). She disagreed with this sentiment and thought the reluctance of parents to participate in school was more likely a result of the parents' lack of knowledge and understanding of the Australian schooling system. A lack of understanding and knowledge about schooling is an essential point that affects parental participation and was made in Chapter 2 by Rutter, (2001) and Hughes and Beirens (2007). Jamin's father Milarepa discussed his reasons for not attending his children's school.⁴¹ He explained that he did not have adequate English skills to communicate confidently with the educators at the school. His commitment, and that of his wife, to studying English during school hours, made visiting the school challenging. These difficulties, as well as his understandings of school based on

⁴⁰ See Chapter 2 for further details on barriers to inclusion for parents of SRE.

⁴¹ See conversations with Milarepa in Chapter 4 regarding his capacity to attend his sons' school.

previous experiences in his home country, where parents were not welcomed at school, had resulted in his reluctance to attend the school.

Further issues are presented for parents if they are unable to assist their children with schoolwork and homework. Difficulties with completing homework, was mentioned by some participants as a cause of further complications for them in mainstream school (see Chapter 4). Milarepa, (Jamin's father), explained that he was not able to support his children with their homework as he did not possess the required English or academic skills to assist them. In a study by Szente et al. (2006), detailed in Chapter 2, it was found that school homework placed additional stress on families. These researchers concluded that parents with refugee backgrounds often felt inadequate to support their children with homework activities.

It was established in Chapter 2 that new ways of involving SRE parents in their child's mainstream schooling may need to be found, that acknowledges the diversity of recently resettled populations. Parents were invited to the end of year assembly at Kurlu Primary. Unfortunately not all of the participants' parents attended. This might be explained by any of the factors mentioned previously, but may include cultural and power barriers (see Chapter 2, Diez et al. 2011 and Boske & Benavente-McEnery, 2010) that determine who is accepted into the social environment of the school. The infrequent participation of the student participant's parents and families at their school, as noted in this research (Chapter 4) has consequences for students, but also for their families.⁴² Alternative approaches to participation at school that successfully include parents and families of SRE, may discourage deficit views of students⁴³ and their families, such as those views described by Daniel's teacher.

⁴² School involvement may reduce inter-generational stress for parents, a point made by Earnest et al. (2007) in Chapter 2.

⁴³ See Matthews (2008), in Chapter 2, regarding challenging deficit views.

Challenging Existing Views

When SRE transition into mainstream school at Kurlu Primary they are immersed into a multicultural school culture. Within the school culture are students, including SRE, who identify from a variety of racial groups, religions and cultural backgrounds.

During my time in the school, I watched class teachers providing a friendly, welcoming and hospitable classroom environment for all class members (as noted in Chapter 4).

The research participants were part of diverse class groups where differing skills and needs of students required a complex variety of teaching approaches. It was raised previously (Chapter 2) that if there are inadequate school resources to support these diverse needs, SRE might be viewed from a deficit view of having something to overcome. The student participants had diverse and complex needs.

Daniel was particularly quiet and withdrawn and his teacher initially attributed this to his lack of academic skills. After spending time with Daniel, I consider his behavior in class may have been influenced by many factors including grief, coping alone with harassment and his inability to connect with the curriculum, culture and others within the school. My assumptions concur with the research of Brinegar (2010) and Garcia & Guerrad (2004), (Chapter 2), who stress that other factors, such as the cultural power imbalances within schools, may be essential to the positive interaction of SRE. They advise against looking at students using a deficit perspective.

Deficit views can be perpetuated at mainstream school when SRE are unable to complete classwork. Daniel confided that he found some things in mainstream school 'hard'. One of the taken for granted aspects of primary schooling, handwriting, was something that Daniel had incredible difficulties with. He admitted to me that he was very slow at writing and reading and that this made all areas of schooling in the classroom arduous for him. Daniel's limited time in the IELC did not compensate for

the many years of schooling that he had missed. This made his immersion in what has been described in Chapter 2 by Woods (2009) as a “print-based school experience” problematic for him (p. 90). It is very difficult to feel that you belong when you know that you cannot complete a task, such as handwriting, that other class members take for granted. However, this was not the only barrier to belonging for Daniel. He was also dealing with power imbalances in his social world ⁴⁴ that were negatively colouring his schooling experience.

It has been substantiated previously in the thesis that with minimal former schooling experience, the step to mainstream school presents SRE with particular difficulties (see Chapters 2 and 4). This was the case with Jamin. He was quiet in class and did not ask questions of the teacher. However, the teacher did comment that he chatted to his friends at times and that this might be deterring his progress. Chatting with friends, I observed, was an excellent tactic on Jamin’s part, for finding out what to do and for clarifying instructions. Jamin was fortunate to have developed a small group of trusted friends, early in his transition to mainstream school during a visit from the IELC (see Chapter 4). However, Jamin’s speech difficulties, together with his lack of previous schooling and frequent house moves since resettlement, had limited Jamin’s capacity to have agency in the culture of mainstream school.

SRE like Daniel and Jamin, have made incredible journeys to a new country where the cultural context is quite foreign to them. Yet they have much to offer such as their knowledge of languages, geography and their worldviews and experience. They also exhibit remarkable persistence and resilience. It has been emphasised (see Chapter 2) that educators should look past what students ‘can’t do’ and cast aside assumptions, in

⁴⁴ See discussion of power imbalances in Chapter 2, i.e. Carrington & Robinson (2006); Garcia & Guerrad (2004); Taylor & Richardson (2005); Yuval-Davis (2011).

order to appreciate and cultivate what SRE can do. Starting with these skills for the schooling of SRE is an essential for developing critical pedagogies for SRE.

Building on English Language Skills

Understandings from Chapter 4 show the participants to have varying competencies with English language skills. Zaria was fluent with English language. Myat and Jamin, however, both commented that they were struggling with English language and that it had affected their success at school. Limitations with spoken English had not impaired Jamin with friendship-making. Conversely, possessing confident spoken English had not resulted in Daniel making many significant connections with others at school. This study suggests that having sound English language skills is important for establishing pathways to belonging, but that it alone does not alone facilitate belonging to mainstream school.

The first experience of schooling in Australia for SRE is often at an IELC. As noted in Chapter 2, at IELCs students have possibilities to develop a new language and cultural knowledge and understandings. The time spent in IELCs may no longer be adequate for some students, such as Daniel and Jamin, who have had no or limited previous experiences with schooling.⁴⁵ Jamin and Daniel had been faced with additional problems in mainstream school due to their low literacy levels in their first language.

Information about students and their progress both socially and academically is passed from IELCs to mainstream schools. As discussed in Chapter 2, by Hale et al. (2008), this knowledge may assist educators to heighten their awareness of the challenges and obstacles students face in mainstream school. During the time of data collection at the school, an examination of the participants' records indicated that

⁴⁵ This point is made by Miller et al. (2005) and consistent with the concerns of Homes (2008) (see Chapter 2).

information transferred from IELCs to the current school was inconsistent in both quality and quantity.⁴⁶ Several students had little or no information available from their previous school while in contrast Daniel had a large folder of comprehensive information recorded at the IELC. The transient nature of some SRE families, a point made earlier in this chapter, can result in students attending several IELCs and mainstream schools. This, in turn, may result in the inconsistent distribution of student information to mainstream schools.

Conversations with Myat (in Chapter 4) revealed that he considered that the English he had acquired in the IELC had not prepared him for his transition into mainstream primary school. He had found much of the language used in the normal school day confusing. He especially found 'technical' words (i.e. subject specific words) difficult. The provision of someone to sit with him and explain words, he thought, would be of significant assistance to him. So despite Myat's history of completing some schooling in English before arriving in Australia, he too had found classroom English difficult. Jamin had trouble understanding English in class and commented that he does "*nothing*" when he doesn't understand or he asks his friends (see Chapter 4).

Written English tasks proved troubling for Myat, Jamin and Daniel (see Chapter 4). Myat asked many questions of the teacher, myself and other class members while Jamin and Daniel mainly worked quietly in the classroom. Their progress was slower than that of Myat. It was suggested in Chapter 2 that the established approach of teaching English through the use of genre in mainstream school might be limiting SRE⁴⁷. The participants in the study were learning about the genre of 'Expositions'. This form of writing requires an adequate knowledge of English language and technical terms, in a specific subject area.

⁴⁶ Further information on my examination of student records can be found in Chapter 4.

⁴⁷ See Dooley (2009) Chapter 2, regarding teaching English.

For SRE, acquiring English skills is essential. However, as established in Chapter 2⁴⁸ it is a mistake to focus on these skills alone. Importantly, schools may provide places of safety and belonging for SRE. Acquiring competent English skills may assist with safety and belonging by providing openings for SRE to have agency and to access the hidden curriculum and a social network.

Structure

In Chapter 2, the important role of social structures was discussed. It was established that structures are a reciprocal process whereby people's practices are shaped by structures, but that these practices also shape and reproduce structures. Thus it was proposed, social structures in schools can both enable or restrain agency, dependent upon whom they privilege. Certain ways of knowing and understanding become 'taken-for-granted' and might be seen as necessary and normal.⁴⁹ The result may be school structures, including policies, where the power and privilege that is afforded to certain groups goes unnoticed and uncontested. Two themes emerged from the data analysis; 'Identifying the influence of school structures' and 'Understanding policies'. These are discussed below.

Identifying the Influence of School Structures

A normalised view of the school community as 'multicultural,' as in Kurlu Primary School, can result in structures that are aimed at promoting social justice through equal opportunity, rather than equity (see Chapter 2). The multicultural nature of the research school site might result in individual needs being disguised and going

⁴⁸ See Matthews (2008) and Block, et al. (2014) in Chapter 2.

⁴⁹ This was also raised in Chapter 3 where the role of the researcher in observing these structures is discussed.

unnoticed. The enormous diversity within the school community might be in contrast to the uniform structures of mainstream school.

Power relationships are an important influence on a student's pathway to belonging⁵⁰ and may result in exclusion or discrimination by dominant school members. This is consistent with Daniel's experience of domination and bullying by an older group of students. This bullying left Daniel feeling excluded and unsafe. Daniel struggled as he negotiated his two known worlds (a difficulty highlighted in Chapter 2 by Sainsbury & Renzaho, 2011) and his presence as part of a non-white, ethnic minority made him an obvious 'other' even in the multicultural community of Kurlu Primary School.

School structures where class formation is based on age also created difficulties for the student participants, especially those with few previous experiences of schooling.

Daniel and Jamin were confronted with the difficulties of attempting to learn skills that others had been developing for many years, while they simultaneously acquired English literacy skills. As noted with the research of Oliver et al. (2009), in Chapter 2, same-age classes may be a significant cause of difficulty for SRE in mainstream school.

The EALD teacher mentioned that the current support structures at Kurlu Primary School, limited the amount of time in which EALD teachers could provide individual support to the student participants (Chapter 4). EALD teachers now predominately worked with SRE in mainstream (same-age) classes. Daniel and Myat both stated that one of the things that would markedly assist them at school would be the provision of an adult or mentor to sit with them and help them during lesson times (see Chapter 4).

Structures designed to facilitate this, and to assist their participation in multi-age classes, would provide students with encouragement, reassurance and would fortify the development of pathways to belonging for them.

⁵⁰ See the importance of power relations established by Silver, (2010) and Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist (2003, 2011) in Chapter 2.

Understanding Policies

Understandings from Ball (2015), (see Chapter 2) of the way policies work within schools and their implications for social justice, elucidate their important influence on belonging to school for SRE. Mainstream school policies can be ‘taken for granted’ and enacted at the level of common sense in ways that are not immediately apparent to SRE. For example, Myat spoke of the difficulties that he had encountered learning and understanding the rules at his current school. Daniel also found school rules less than transparent. Both boys had been issued with ‘tickets’ for breaking rules with Daniel experiencing a school suspension. Jamin too had difficulties with understanding school rules. The importance of implementing school rules in a way that considers the developing language skills and possible acculturation tensions of SRE, is emphasised in the DECD ‘Count Me In’ document (Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2007)⁵¹. In this document teachers are reminded that SRE are in the process of cultural learning and learning about behaviour expectations in their new school environment.

Providing a welcoming environment for SRE has been accentuated in Chapter 2, as vitally important for developing belonging.⁵² A policy that ensures a welcoming environment for SRE would encourage the provision of a socially just and quality education for them. This type of education is prescribed in the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008), an important policy document discussed in Chapter 2. The provision of a trusted adult, with whom SRE could share knowledge and ask questions, would support a welcoming environment and offer openings for pathways to belonging for SRE. Recall the success that Myat experienced when working with my additional support in literacy and Daniel’s enthusiasm in

⁵¹ Refer to the discussion of the ‘Count Me In’ document and its role in Chapter 2.

⁵² See reference to the research of Hughes and Beirens (2007), Taylor (2008) and Hattam & Every (2010), in Chapter 2.

Mathematics when supported by me to complete tasks⁵³. Extra adult assistance provided them with openings to interact with other class members and the teacher and to be successful. Provision of an adult mentor would also have been beneficial for Jamin. Such a mentor may have promptly alerted others in the school to Jamin's speech difficulties.

An important issue to consider, when examining structures, is the influence of neoliberal policies in mainstream school. This influence has been discussed in Chapter 2 where it was revealed that neoliberal policies have resulted in a decreased focus on social justice issues⁵⁴. Neoliberal policies may result in less attention being given to structures and policies to promote equity for students. As a result of such policies, the responsibility to succeed is placed solely onto the individual student to catch up, work hard and complete homework. This emphasis was reflected in Daniel's report where recommendations were made for him to complete more homework and to persist at tasks (see Chapter 4). Placing the responsibility onto the student results in the emphasis being on what students cannot do, rather than looking at the many skills that they bring to school. For example, Daniel spoke three or more languages and every day in mainstream school was an act of persistence for him.

The successful schooling of SRE is reliant upon the structures and policies of individual schools. In Chapter 2, it has been emphasised by Sidhu and Taylor (2007) that the provision of a consolidated approach requires the interaction and cooperation between community, religious and government organisations. A consolidated approach in mainstream schools for the education of SRE could start with some 'minimum standards' as recommended by Kirk and Cassity (2011) in Chapter 2.

⁵³ These examples are described in Chapter 4.

⁵⁴ This is established by Sleeter (2012) and Taylor (2008), in Chapter, 2.

Practices

School practices are intrinsically connected to the existing and historical culture and structures of the school. In Chapter 2 it was explained that ‘taken for granted’ practices in schools are shaped over time. Edgerton & Roberts (2014) (see Chapter 2) saw such practices as dependent upon the agreement of “resource-contingent socialised skills” (p. 210). Students who are immersed in mainstream school, and do not possess these taken for granted skills such as SRE, will find practices difficult to understand, follow and comply with. This makes belonging to school problematic for SRE. ‘Recognising racism and taking action on it’; ‘Supporting inclusive school practices’ and ‘Engaging students through supportive pedagogies’ are discussed here as school practices that promote belonging.

Recognising Racism and Taking Action

The arrival of students from the African continent to Kurlu School is a recent occurrence and they represent a minority group within the school community. The normalised view of the school community at Kurlu Primary School, as ‘multicultural’ may lead to silences on such issues as racism.⁵⁵ Walsh (2010) has contributed to this argument in Chapter 2 when he explains that racism may be a problem when schools are seen a support mechanism, but are also the main place that young people experience racist behaviour. The ‘Count Me In’ document, discussed earlier in this chapter and further explained in Chapter 2, (Department of Education and Children's Services, 2007) asserts that in schools where discrimination of minority groups is addressed, belonging is supported.

⁵⁵ This view is presented by Mazzei (2008) in Chapter 2.

Daniel and Zaria both reported being affected by racist incidents while Jamin and Myat did not. The former students were both part of a minority African group within the school community. Their experiences echo points made in Chapter 2 by Von Aspern (2009) and Colic-Peisker (2006), who viewed a correlation between skin colour and the unease of students. Zaria was a very popular student and was looked up to by her peers. Yet she was teased due to her African appearance (see Chapter 4). Daniel was quiet and withdrawn except when he was with Zaria. He was harassed by a group of older boys who singled him out for repeated, unwanted attention. He was convinced this harassment was due to his African heritage. Two students with very different personalities and yet they both purported to being harassed due to their racial background.

Kurlu School had clear policies in place for dealing with racist incidents. In Chapter 4 it was noted that Zaria was pleased with the way her complaint about bullying was handled and she felt that it had been dealt with well. Daniel 'suffered in silence'. On the basis of the study alone it would be difficult to account for all the factors that contributed to his silence. However, I did observe that once he had elucidated the racist incidents to me and acknowledged that I would be enlightening his teacher of the issues, he appeared to be more relaxed. The need to take immediate action on racist incidents is supported by the policies at Kurlu Primary School.⁵⁶ Responding to racist incidents immediately is seen by Rutter (2006) to be vitally important. Racist behaviour was not tolerated at Kurlu Primary School.

Furthermore, in Chapter 2, attention was drawn to the difficulties that may occur for SRE when assumptions are by educators. This is of particular importance when addressing racism in schools where it is vital that educators are aware of their own assumptions and bias.⁵⁷ This is an imperative consideration to make when planning and making decisions

⁵⁶ As documented in Chapter 4.

⁵⁷ See Parks, (1999) in Chapter 2 regarding racism in schools.

about the curriculum, as opportunities for SRE to connect to the curriculum are essential. Assumptions may also be made when students are expected to behave in certain ways due to their ethnicity. Such an assumption was made when Elisabeth was reportedly involved (described in Chapter 4) in an altercation with other African female students. The assumption was that there was no reason for the students to fight, as they were all 'African'. The perceived physical similarities between students did not account for their life stories. Keddie & Niesche, 2012, and DeCuir & Dixson, 2004 (in Chapter 2) have also drawn attention to how the silencing of diversity within mainstream school and the practice of ignoring racial and cultural difference, may result in practices that perpetuate injustice, by failing to recognise racial tension and incidents.

Supporting Inclusive School Practices

A continued commitment to social justice programs in schools, where the aim is the increased participation in all areas of schooling and an improved sense of well being and belonging, is essential for SRE in mainstream school. For as Von Aspern (2009) reminds us (in Chapter 2), practices designed to assist SRE are not successful if they do not result in improvements to wellbeing and belonging.

The facilitation of the participants' inclusion in swapping classes, specialist classes, swimming activities, excursions, after school sport, assemblies and social skills activities such as the peer mediation program, had offered the students openings to social interactions with many school members and other adults. These activities allowed school members to interact in less structured ways, to have a voice and as Carrington and Robinson (2006) claim in Chapter 2, foster belonging. Participating in these activities provided SRE with occasions to increase their cultural knowledge, to improve their content knowledge and to increase their English vocabulary. Myat considered that swapping classes for Mathematics had assisted him with relationship

building within the school and enabled him to 'get to know' some boys in the other classroom.

Including SRE in activities is not the same as providing school practices that enable students' full inclusion. Recall Elisabeth's minimal peer interactions during swimming. She followed instructions and did what she was required to do, but she displayed no obvious enjoyment of the activity and isolated herself from the group. There appeared to be some 'taken for granted' aspects of the activity that were incomprehensible to her with the result that she was not fully included.⁵⁸

Furthermore, Elisabeth, unlike the participants, did not participate in sporting activities during break times. During the research period the participants were observed playing cricket, soccer and basketball regularly. Elisabeth was not discerned engaging in sporting activities despite displaying sound skills in this area during lesson times. She continued to operate at the fringes of the playground and to mix with her sister and her sister's friends. Her behaviour reflected Riggs and Due's (2009, 2010) conclusions from their research, discussed in Chapter 2. They found that SRE often do not feel free to inhabit the communal and play areas of others and that this may result in exclusive practices. Exclusionary practices result in decreased social connections and have been shown to have adverse effects on the mental health and well being of SRE (Chapter 2). Established inclusive school practices that were aimed at promoting positive peer interactions, would have supported Elisabeth in her quest for belonging at mainstream school. SRE may be vulnerable as they enter mainstream school. Their dispossessed backgrounds and resulting poverty, difficulties with English language, experiences with acculturation and their lack of knowledge of schooling processes, might result in them having reduced agency. It is possible that the reluctance from other students to befriend Elisabeth may have resulted from a concern that

⁵⁸ A further description of Elisabeth's social interactions is given in Chapter 4.

befriending Elisabeth would have involved a cost to them. As Silver (2010) claims (see Chapter 2) this cost can include the need to share friends, opportunities and time.

For an inclusive education to be relevant it will provide opportunities and a curriculum that acknowledges and celebrates the diverse voices and perspectives of SRE.⁵⁹ This includes educators knowing the history of SRE and making meaningful links with parents and families. For example, the harassment incident that Daniel was experiencing and his mother's responses to it, illustrates how important it is to provide authentic inclusive practices and a genuine welcome to SRE and their families at mainstream school.

Engaging Students through Supportive Pedagogies

Supportive pedagogies provide SRE with opportunities to learn, to connect new knowledge with their existing knowledge and to experience some success. Feeling successful at school is important for promoting belonging for all students. It might have special relevance for SRE who arrive at mainstream school with a diversified set of socialised skills from the endorsed, school normative and who may find mainstream school practices problematic. Feeling successful can assist students to build some cultural capital within their new environment.

Working in groups was a pedagogical practice purported by Myat and Jamin, to have significantly assisted them at school. They clarified that group work had provided them with situations in which they could 'have fun' and 'talk' (see Chapter 4). Working in small groups had provided opportunities to gain support from other class members, to be successful and to feel part of the class. However, it was stressed in Chapter 2 (see Dooley, 2009) that the success of promoting inclusion by using group activities, is

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2, Taylor and Sidhu (in Block et al., 2014, p. 1340).

reliant upon educators employing formal structuring practices. These would be for the selection of group members and for the assignment of tasks within groups. The importance of establishing formal group structuring processes, was illustrated by my observation of Elisabeth's exclusions during sporting activities. When students were asked to form groups without guidance in Physical education activities, I observed Elisabeth to be repeatedly ignored and excluded.

Pedagogical practices where content skills are learnt in context and connections are made between existing knowledge and new knowledge are essential for SRE (Chapter 2 ⁶⁰). The study of expositions at Kurlu Primary was prompted by the likely inclusion of this genre in future NAPLAN testing.⁶¹ As discussed in Chapter 2, options to talk through ideas and brainstorm with a trusted adult supports students with literacy learning by assisting with developing their technical vocabulary and the complex grammar associated with English writing. I recognised the benefits afforded by this support when I sat with Myat. He asked many questions about the words to use and why these words were good choices. He discussed what he knew on the subject of the exposition and I noticed that the writing that he completed was the most comprehensive piece of writing in his workbook. He was very proud of his effort and keen to show the teacher of his achievement.

Interrupted or lack of previous schooling has been discussed previously as a source of major difficulties for SRE in mainstream school. This was demonstrated by the struggles of Daniel and Jamin during Mathematics lessons where they puzzled over both the content and the explanations given by the teacher. My concern with the students' disengagement with the mathematics curriculum resonates with the

⁶⁰ See Dooley (2009) in Chapter 2 for further information on this.

⁶¹ More information on NAPLAN testing can be found in Chapter 2.

concerns of Miller et al., (2005).⁶² Their Australian study suggests that SRE with limited or interrupted schooling possess some key educational gaps responsible for some difficulties faced by students. Daniel and Jamin required alternative pedagogical approaches to allow them to access the curriculum and feel connected to what was happening in the classroom.

It is important that provisions be made at school for SRE to build connections between new concepts and their existing knowledge and experience.⁶³ Misunderstanding may occur when students cannot relate or connect with the content being presented. I discovered when talking with Daniel how literally he interpreted my questions and how easily he was confused by colloquialisms. Research referred to in Chapter 2, (for example see Gutstein and Peterson, 2005) indicates that a foundation to build new knowledge and more abstract concepts, especially in the case of Mathematics, could be built from the existing knowledge of SRE.

Social interactions were fraught with challenges for Daniel and Myat. My understandings from the student records indicated to me that both students had fled their home countries at a time of great unrest and/or war. Misunderstandings may have been cultivated for the students by a discrepancy in their experiences, understandings and values and those of the school. For example, the value of 'Responsibility' as spelt out in the NFVEAS⁶⁴ "be accountable for one's own actions, resolve differences in constructive, non-violent and peaceful ways, contribute to society and to civic life, take care of the environment" (National Framework for Values Education in Australian schools, 2011, p. 4) may have been irrelevant for students who had escaped from countries where conflict was enacted by violent means. The NFVEAS values have limited currency in today's Australian multicultural population. Previous

⁶² Information on the research of Miller, Mitchell and Brown (2005), has been discussed in Chapter 2.

⁶³ This is supported by Subban (2006) in Chapter 2.

⁶⁴ Further information on the NFVEAS and its relevance to pathways to belonging, is given in Chapter 2.

studies⁶⁵ call attention to the teaching of values education in schools that acknowledges and appreciates the values of SRE. Pedagogical approaches to the teaching of values where the focus is on celebrating diversity and inclusion would assist SRE like Daniel and Myat, with social interactions and foster belonging.

The student participants commented on the importance of being involved in curriculum areas such as drama, language classes and physical education. When engaged in such activities, students were provided with circumstances to work in groups, talk freely, be successful and display their skills in areas that did not require fluent English language skills. In particular the student participants mentioned the importance to them of participating in physical education activities. This is consistent with the research of Spaaij (2011)⁶⁶ who found that inclusion in sporting activities reduced social isolation and increased feelings of belonging. Sporting activities with clear and universal rules of participation, provided participants with a common activity based on physical skills, where success was not reliant upon fluent English language skills or cultural knowledge and understandings.

According to additional research discussed in Chapter 2 ⁶⁷ developing the skills of SRE in a diversity of curriculum areas such as music, drama, art and sport, has been shown to support literacy development, other content areas, social skills and pathways of belonging to school. Maintaining possibilities in mainstream school, for involvement in a diverse range of curriculum areas may assist SRE to interact with others and provide them with successful experiences. In Chapter 2, Sleeter (2010) has drawn attention to the political role of teachers' work and its "increasingly standardized and pressurized" focus (p. 577). She purports this to be due to an emphasis on neoliberal policies in mainstream school and predicts that attempts by teachers to implement culturally

⁶⁵ Such studies include those of Due & Riggs (2010) and McBrien (2005) and are referred to in Chapter 2.

⁶⁶ Spaaij's research is discussed in Chapter 2 in regard to SRE participating in physical education activities.

⁶⁷ See reference to Hones (2007) and Due, et al. (2014) in Chapter 2 where this point is established.

responsive pedagogy and a diverse range of curriculum areas, will become fraught with difficulties. The resulting erosion of access to participation in a range of curriculum fields, may deny SRE valuable openings to belonging in mainstream school.

Key Findings

This chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings as represented in Figure 5.1. These reflect the main findings from the review of the literature and the empirical data gathered. Depicted are some considerations important to the development of pathways to belonging for SRE in mainstream school. These have been classified under the three dominant categories of mainstream school - culture, structure and practice. It is important to acknowledge that these three elements interact and are reciprocal as represented by the connecting arrows in Figure 5.1. The essential theoretical concepts that have informed the research; normative views, powerful knowledge, cultural capital, power dynamics, identity, and agency are represented as central elements of the figure. The key findings represented here will be discussed further in Chapter 6 (to follow) and will provide a framework for some practical recommendations for schools. The recommendations for facilitating pathways to belonging for SRE, along with some focus points, a discussion of possible limitations of the research, directions for further research and ethnographic considerations, will form Chapter 6, the last chapter in the thesis.

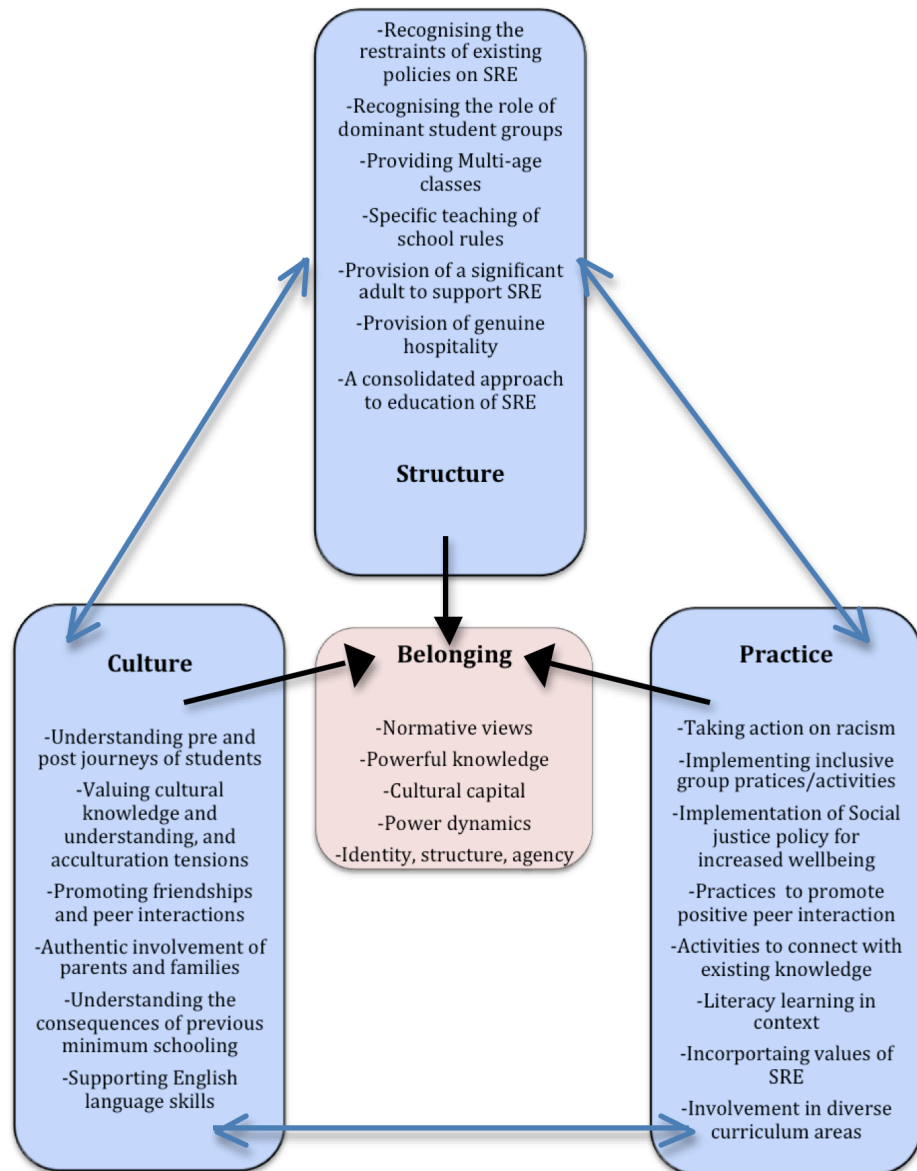


Figure 5.1: Considerations for supporting pathways to belonging for SRE in mainstream school

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

SUPPORTING BELONGING FOR SRE

While every refugee's story is different and their anguish personal, they all share a common thread of uncommon courage – the courage not only to survive, but to persevere and rebuild their shattered lives.

Antonio Guterres, (2005).

This study was about belonging. Belonging to school is important for all students. As Carrington and Robinson (2006) remind us, “[a] sense of belonging and relationships of trust and tolerance” can bring great benefits to all school members (p. 327). For students of refugee experience, developing pathways to belonging to school is additionally important so they may have opportunities to “rebuild their shattered lives” (Guterres, 2005).

This chapter summarises the main findings from the study and includes recommendations for future school practice. Suggestions for further research are given. Additionally the limitations of the study and some ethnographic considerations are discussed.

Key Findings

The major findings from the study are discussed here under the analytic categories of school culture, structure and practice. These have a reciprocal, tri-partite relationship as stressed in Chapter 3. It is important to note, when considering the key findings, that belonging to school is not a fixed entity and students will develop different degrees and types of connection at school (Yuval-Davis, 2011, p. 200).

Culture

A key finding from the study indicates the importance of developing cultural awareness for both SRE and for educators within mainstream school. Yuval-Davis (2011) reminds us that cultural awareness works both ways and highlights the need for developing care and trust between all group members. This awareness includes the complexities faced by refugee cultures and mainstream school cultures as they intersect.

As emphasised in the previous chapter, gaining knowledge of SRE and their journeys, experiences, knowledge and skills promotes belonging for SRE by fostering understanding, awareness and empathy. Such understanding also enables openings to be made into friendship-making for SRE. This research points to recognising that SRE are not a homogenous group and that each student brings with them particular experiences and understandings of displacement and resettlement. Additionally the findings show that providing opportunities for SRE to be heard and to tell their stories opens possibilities for them to feel valued for who they are and what they bring to mainstream school. This may result in any pre-existing views of SRE that are held by educators and students to be challenged.

Indications from the study show that without strong home/school communication for SRE, misunderstandings and miscommunications may occur. These links promote understanding and knowledge of students and their families. Concurrently, regular communication and participation of SRE families, provides them with opportunities to connect to their child's school and for cultural learning. Provision of a regular communication pathway for individual SRE and their families would support this. Parents, caregivers, educators and students would all benefit from these strong links.

This study has acknowledged that sound English language skills support SRE to navigate through the social and political structures of mainstream school. For many students of refugee experience, especially those entering at the higher levels of mainstream school with little previous schooling, longer times might be needed in IELCs than has traditionally been offered. Students may develop skills in conversational English from their time in the IELC, however, their English skills may not extend to knowledge of the technical, mathematical or complex language skills needed for curriculum learning (especially in higher primary grades) at mainstream school. This is of special relevance to students who have had minimal or no previous schooling. However, the findings from the study suggest that developing competent English language skills does not alone facilitate belonging to school for SRE.

Structures

A decreased focus in mainstream schools on social justice and equity and the increased focus on neo-liberal policies may have resulted in less attention being given to SRE and their social/emotional welfare. Structural change within mainstream school will allow for a consolidated approach to the educational experience of SRE in mainstream school to be made. The findings suggest that such structural changes could include provision of multi-age learning opportunities, regular support from an adult, making 'taken for granted' rules and policies transparent for SRE and creating structures that scrutinize power relationships and provide openings into social relationships for SRE.

Limited English skills, acculturation and interrupted schooling might make negotiating through mainstream school structures difficult for SRE. Provision of opportunities for SRE to be involved in multi-age groups and classes promotes belonging by allowing students to interact, contribute and learn at their own pace. Establishing a relationship of trust with a significant adult would provide support for SRE by furnishing openings

into mainstream cultural understandings, school routines, procedures and rules, and curriculum and class activities. An adult who could take time to 'get to know' the student and be a stable feature of their mainstream school experience would assist students with developing belonging.

A consolidated approach to the schooling of SRE where genuine hospitality is offered is essential for supporting belonging in mainstream school. This approach would include recognising the power and privilege of some students within the culture and structures of mainstream school.

Practices

Important for facilitating belonging for SRE are the development of inclusive school practices and pedagogies. Racist incidents need to be consistently followed up and acted upon. This requires the provision of clear guidelines and policies in place to assist the implementation of this action. Recognising that racism may also be covert and enacted through the existing practices and structures of the school (including the curriculum) is relevant for promoting SRE belonging. Prioritising the increased participation of SRE in all school areas will assist pathways to belonging. Recognising school practices that may exclude, providing practices and structures to include SRE and making 'taken for granted' practices transparent, will assist this process. Activities may be difficult for SRE to relate to if they are based on concepts outside of their own knowledge base and experience. For example incorporating the values of SRE into values teaching pedagogies and programming is an inclusive school practice.

Students of refugee experience often attend new schools after friendships have been established within classes. School practices that actively promote interaction between all students allow SRE possibilities to 'break into' these groups. Structured group work activities provide regular opportunities for SRE to talk with their peers and assist with

establishing friendships. Belonging is enhanced in these situations, where students can ask questions, learn about others and be supported by their peers. Important for this is for a variety of teacher orchestrated methods for forming groups to be established. Also important is for group member to have established roles, so that SRE are not excluded from full participation within the group.

Furthermore, belonging in mainstream school is promoted for SRE when they experience success. Students' involvement in a wide range of curriculum activities that are not literacy or numeracy dependent, including Physical Education, Art and Drama is essential. Through these activities SRE are enabled to showcase their knowledge and skills that may otherwise go unrecognised. Tailoring classroom curriculum to suit the specific learning and social/emotional requirements of SRE is crucial, especially for students with little or no previous schooling.

Recommendations

The table below, 6.1, provides a summary of recommendations for promoting belonging to school for SRE in mainstream primary school. It is essential to reinstate the reciprocal relationship between culture-structure-practice. Although represented separately in the table, all recommendations are affected by the tripartite relationship between these school features. The suggestions below are indicative of the significant role that schools may play in strengthening the "sense of community and belonging" for SRE (Singh et al., 2010, p. 171).

Table 6.1: Recommendations for Creating Pathways to Belonging in Mainstream School for SRE

Creating pathways to belonging	Recommendations
<p>CULTURE</p> <p>Developing cultural awareness within the school.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 'Getting to know' SRE and their families by providing opportunities for SRE to tell their stories and by actively engaging parents. 2. Valuing the cultural skills and knowledge of SRE and challenging deficit models by including their views, opinions and knowledge. 3. Authentically involving parents and families regularly at school in classroom activities, curriculum implementation and school decision-making and including their opinions. 4. Maintaining clear communication between home and school for SRE by establishing accessible, regular, communication links. 5. Providing opportunities for teachers to source information from IELCs, talk to previous teachers and to familiarise themselves with students' information folders. 6. Providing regular and consistent on-going support for SRE with new cultural knowledge and English language skills.
<p>STRUCTURE</p> <p>Providing genuine hospitality through whole school socially just structures and policies.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Providing of a warm, welcoming and culturally inclusive school environment and classroom culture. 2. Reviewing existing structures and making changes to include the inclusive participation of SRE. 3. Ensuring the on-going and explicit teaching of structures such as classroom/school rules and their consequences. 4. Establishing regular, frequent, on-going support for SRE with a significant adult in the school. 5. Developing consolidated, school social justice policies, aimed at the well-being of SRE. 6. Providing opportunities for SRE to learn in multi-age classes or groups, rather than same-age. 7. Recognising the power of dominant groups and how this influences the social interaction of SRE.

<p>PRACTICE</p> <p>Providing genuine inclusive practices and pedagogies to promote engagement and belonging.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implementing clear and consistent practices regarding racism. Acting immediately on racist incidents. 2. Facilitating regular structured group work, using inclusive group formation processes, to ensure peer interaction. 3. Providing regular, on-going inclusion for SRE in a diverse range of curriculum areas including Physical Education and the Arts. 4. Connecting new learning to the existing knowledge base and concepts of SRE (including values). 5. Facilitating the regular use of graphic organisers, concrete materials, conversation and brainstorming to support SRE learning. 6. Connecting 'real life' experiences and SRE interests with new concepts to facilitate greater understanding. 7. Differentiating the curriculum (using critical pedagogies) to suit the learning needs of SRE especially those with little or no previous schooling. 8. Providing on-going professional development for teachers into critical pedagogy for teaching SRE. 9. Scrutinising curriculum to ensure that it is inclusive of SRE and that it is anti racist.
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Focus Points

The recommendations in the table above interconnect across the three school categories of culture, structure and practice. As a starting point, I would like to draw attention to several focus points for promoting belonging.

The important place of cultural knowledge

Schools are important places for cultural learning. Knowing and understanding the dominant cultural frames of western schooling is advantageous for students. Regular support from a trusted adult who can assist SRE with not only negotiating school structures, but also with cultural learning in the new environment of mainstream

school would foster belonging. It is important too, for all students to celebrate other ways of constructing culture aside from the cultural norms of mainstream school. Openings into other ways of perceiving the world would be provided by the inclusion and appreciation of the cultural knowledge of SRE. Sharing cultural knowledge is essential for promoting understanding and empathy between students.

The need to make visible the invisible

It is essential to make the 'taken-for-granted' structures and policies of mainstream school explicit for SRE. Without this knowledge SRE are denied opportunities for full participation and belonging. For example the explicit teaching of school rules and policies around racism and bullying is a school practice that promotes belonging for SRE. When SRE transition to mainstream school they may not have the language skills or cultural understandings needed for understanding or complying with these. Explicit instruction assists SRE to navigate through the culture and structures of mainstream school as they negotiate pathways to belonging.

Knowledge sharing as an essential practice

Sharing knowledge of SRE and their family's histories and journeys to resettlement, between educators and other organisations, is important. Communication from IELCs and other agencies, who have worked with SRE and their families, would provide teachers with valuable understandings. Establishing school structures whereby teachers are provided with time to read student records from IELCs and to talk with others about students is vital. Through this process of 'knowledge gathering', educators may establish some initial awareness and perceptions of SRE, their families, their cultural understandings and their journeys and histories. This practice would

promote empathy and awareness and enable educators to take affirmative action steps to promote belonging for students.

Of course I recognise that the recommendations above (including Table 6.1) would be supported by additional funding in mainstream school for resources to provide greater access to bilingual education, the professional development of teachers, the implementation of appropriate social justice initiatives and the development of culturally responsive, critical pedagogies.

Limitations of the Study

This ethnographic study was strengthened by the time commitment by the researcher, of one to two days a week over a three to four month period. However, longer, qualitative, longitudinal research that follows the participants' progression through several years in the school system of their host country, could establish how students' feelings of belonging and their "perceptions of place in school" develop over time (Oikonomidou, 2007, p. 25). Documenting these changes may be relevant to understanding the settlement experience for young students of refugee experience and their outcomes (Beiser, 2006, in Correa-Velez et al., 2010). The theory in this research project evolved as the research data was gathered. I was limited in exploring this further by my own time restraints and those of the school. It would be useful to complete a subsequent research project where this could be achieved.

The small sample of participants for this study provided rich, deep data to analyse. However, the small size of the sample means that caution should be employed when generalizing the findings to all SRE as the participants were unique individuals with their own stories to tell. The participants did, however, share many challenges such as the forced movement from their home country, life in a refugee camp and resettlement

in a new country. Despite this their responses to these challenges were uniquely different. The cultural diversity of the participants was one factor that influenced this.

Participants' difficulties with English language and their young age may have also limited the research. During interviews, some student participants were at times initially reluctant to talk of their experiences, and appeared to have difficulties in recalling experiences.⁶⁸ Any data collected from interviews might have been influenced by the participants' desire to provide the answers that they thought were expected of them. The researcher acknowledges that a further limitation may be that data collection and analysis was reliant upon the interpretation of the researcher and that it could be difficult to replicate.

Of consideration also is that the research study was conducted at one school site. Further, ethnographic research studies at other school sites could strengthen the validity of the findings from the data analysis. An additional limit of the research was that it didn't engage with the broader, political and social implications of multilayer concepts of belonging. This would be a fruitful area of investigation for future ethnographic research.

Ethnographic Reflections

It was a great responsibility to represent the participants' views and interactions faithfully and without bias. To this purpose I have been reflexive and have described my own biases, ethnicity, feelings, gender, history and beliefs in my writing. I have sought to counter any biases by making them explicit and by checking my impressions against other sources. I acknowledge that as an experienced teacher, I bring a wide

⁶⁸ See initial conversations with Daniel and Jamin in Chapter 4.

range of experiences to the research and that some of these experiences assisted me in the study.

The knowledge and skills that I possessed as an experienced primary school teacher enabled me to confidently work with both students and teachers in a setting with which I was familiar. I was knowledgeable of the functioning of South Australian DECD primary schools and I appreciated that they were busy and complex places. I was required to be flexible and to fit my research schedule around the school's priorities. Most importantly I possessed the skills to work confidently and in a non-threatening manner, with a group of young, vulnerable students and was able to build trust with them. Without initially building trust, gathering data would have been challenging. To further my responsibility of giving an accurate representation in this thesis I have gone back to the literature and I have re-read quotes and citations in context to ensure that I have captured their meaning.

Fewer teachers volunteered to be included in the research than I had anticipated.⁶⁹

The research was dependent on the support of class teachers to assist with recruiting participants and for allowing me to observe and participate in their daily class activities. Two teachers volunteered to be included in the project and this constrained the number of participants I could approach to volunteer for the research.

Furthermore, adjustments were required for obtaining informed consent. The low literacy skills of parents in their first language and the obscurity of some home languages resulted in a need to find other ways of gaining this.

The student participants' unfamiliarity with English language and their low literacy skills required me to approach recruitment and interactions in a slow and careful

⁶⁹ A possible reason for this may be due to what Hargreaves (1994) and Dorman (2003) call teacher 'burnout' caused by a variety of institutional and personal variables. Some teachers may have been reluctant to volunteer for the research in case it entailed a further cost to their time and resources

manner. As a participant observer I was required to observe keenly and listen carefully for student interactions. Building trust took time and students were wary of me at first. Gathering data was a slow process and entailed a considerable time commitment.

This thesis began with the words of Mayol and will finish with his words (see Chapter 1). I talked with him towards the end of my fieldwork as he reflected upon his earlier educational experiences. He reaffirmed for me the importance of completing this research project. As an adult he reflected upon his initial time in mainstream school and discussed many acculturation tensions associated with attending mainstream school. He knew that he shared these tensions with other SRE and this is why he emphasized to me:

It is important that you complete this research so that there is greater awareness in schools of the difficulties that refugee students face.

The populations of Australian schools are changing. This change necessitates that new ways be found to educate at mainstream school in order that the particular needs of diverse groups, including SRE, are met (McCarthy & Vickers, 2008). The established patterns of culture, structure and practice in mainstream school may no longer provide appropriate responses to these challenges.

This research has provided one story of SRE and their pathways to belonging to school. It has highlighted the importance of providing a school environment that enables belonging to be fostered. At every mainstream school more stories could be told. Telling these stories is important as it is through sharing these that greater understanding of SRE may be developed and school culture, structure and practices scrutinised to promote belonging.

A socially just education for SRE will focus not on only language learning and academic achievement, but also on the social and emotional well being of students and their access to cultural capital (Woods, 2009, p. 98). Through such a focus students can begin to find a place for themselves in mainstream school. Developing feelings of belonging in mainstream school is essential for SRE so they may move forward, “rebuild their shattered lives” (Guterres, 2005) and look to the future with hope.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Questions and Prompts for semi-structured interviews

Proposed Interview Questions for Semi Structured Interviews

Questions for student participants and possible prompts

Mode – Individual face-to-face interviews

- (1.) How long have you been in Australia?
Prompts: Months/ years/ weeks?
- (2.) Tell me something about yourself.
Prompts: your family, things you like/dislike, fun things you have done, something you are good at, where you live, something special just about you.
- (3.) Explain any differences between the school you are at now and your first school Australia.
Prompts: subjects/ activities, classrooms, the outside spaces, the buildings, the people?
- (4.) What things do you like to do with your friends at school?
Prompts: In the classroom/ at playtime/ after school/ on weekends, who are your friends?
- (5.) What are the best things about school?
Prompts: subjects, activities, the people, the buildings,
- (6.) Who can you go to if you need help at school?
Prompts: Friends, teachers, office people, other people
- (7.) If you had three wishes about school what would they be?
Prompts: What would you really like to see happen, or do or make or change at school
- (8.) What activities do you do after school?
Prompts: Do you play school sport, help at home, play with family or friends, do homework?

Appendix B: SBREC Ethics Approval

Dear Fiona,

The Chair of the [Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee \(SBREC\)](#) at Flinders University considered your response to conditional approval out of session and your project has now been granted final ethics approval.

Your ethics final approval notice can be found below.

FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Project No.:

6174

Project Title:

Pathways to belonging: An ethnographic study of ex refugee students making their way in a mainstream South Australian primary school.

Principal Researcher:

Mrs Fiona Picton

Email:

fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au

Address:

48 Balham Avenue
Kingswood SA 5062

Approval Date:

29 August 2013

Ethics
Approval
Expiry Date:

18
November
2014

Appendix C: DECD Approval



Government of South Australia

Department for Education and
Child Development

Strategy and Performance

Level 8
31 Flinders Street
Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 1152
Adelaide SA 5001
DX 541

Tel: 8226 4108
Fax: 8226 1605

DECD CS/13/193-2.6

26 September 2013

Ms Fiona Picton
Flinders University School of Education
GPO BOX 2100
ADELAIDE SA 5001

Dear Ms Picton

Your project titled "Pathways to belonging: An ethnographic study of ex-refugee students making their way in a South Australian primary school" has now been reviewed by a senior Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) consultant with respect to protection from harm, informed consent, confidentiality and suitability of arrangements. Accordingly, I am pleased to advise you that your project has been **approved**.

The DECD Reviewer of this project is Ross Hamilton. If you wish to clarify or discuss further please feel free to contact her on Ph: 8416 7351.

Please contact Ms Allison Cook, Project Officer - Research and Innovation on (08) 8226 4108 for any other matters you may wish to discuss regarding the general review/approval process.

Please supply the department with an electronic copy of the final report which will be circulated to interested staff and then made available to DECD educators for future reference.

I wish you well with your project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Temperly'.

Ben Temperly
HEAD OF STRATEGY AND PERFORMANCE

Appendix D: Letter to the Principal



Dr Neil Welch
Adjunct Lecturer
School of Education
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: 08 8201 3308
Fax: 08 8201 3184

Letter of Introduction

Dear Principal,

This letter is to introduce Fiona Picton who is a Doctorate student in the School of Education at Flinders University. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of her identity.

As part of her Doctorate studies Fiona is required to complete a significant piece of research. Fiona has chosen to research 'Pathways to Belonging: An ethnographic study of students, including ex-refugees, making their way in a South Australian primary school.' It seeks to better understand pathways to belonging and social inclusion, and to identify what may enable or facilitate this, as well identifying possible obstacles or barriers. The findings of this study are expected to be of interest to the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) in that they may help inform policy and practice, as well as being of special interest to the research community and the general public.

We would be very grateful if you would be willing to assist Fiona in her research, by granting her permission to carry out her study in your school, that includes spending up to one day as a participant observer in two of your classes over a period of three months, and in interviewing a small number of students and their parents at your school. The number of students she is hoping to interview is less than ten.

If you agree to permit Fiona to undertake her research in your school, be assured that any information provided or data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants or the name of your school will be individually identifiable in her thesis or any subsequent publication of her findings. Participation in this study

is completely voluntary and if you agree to participate you are free to discontinue your school's participation at any time. Informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality are necessary conditions for any one participating in this study.

This study has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University and by the Research Unit at DECD. This research is being supervised by myself and Dr Grant Banfield. We are both lecturers in the School of Education at Flinders University

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details above. Fiona Picton can be contacted on 0407-812-546 or via email fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Neil Welch
Adjunct Lecturer
School of Education, Flinders University

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 6174.). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

Appendix E: Approval from the Principal

Mrs Fiona Picton
School of Education

Flinders University
Flinders Drive, Bedford Park SA 5042
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: 0883732193
Fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au



Dear Ms Angelakis,

Could you please confirm that you had read and understood the nature of the proposed research entitled *Pathways to Belonging: An Ethnographic study of ex-refugee students making their way in a South Australian primary school*, and have agreed to Fiona Picton conducting her research at your school site? Please confirm by completing the declaration below.

I, A. I. ANGEWAKIS.....have read the information about the research project and I am willing to assist and support Fiona Picton to conduct her research at Challa Gardens Primary School.

Signed [Signature].....

Date 12/8/13.....

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

APPENDIX F: Consent Forms



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Pathways to belonging. An ethnographic study of students making their way in a mainstream South Australian primary school.

I

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested, in the interviews for the research project on Pathways to belonging for students within a South Australian Primary school.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I agree to the researcher accessing my child's school records and reports.
5. I am aware that I am recommended to retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
6. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether I participate or not, or withdraw after participating, will have no effect on any treatment or service that is being provided to me.
 - I understand that I will be asked whether I am happy for interviews to be audio recorded, and that I can decline to have them audio recorded.

- I may ask that the recording/observation and the accessing of my child's records and reports be stopped at any time, and that I may withdraw from the research without disadvantage.

7. I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name..... Fiona Picton.

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature.....Date.....

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number; 6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix G: Script for Teachers

Script for teachers to use when talking to the class.

Over the next few months Fiona Picton will be joining us in the classroom one day a week. Fiona is from Flinders University and she is completing a study about how students develop feelings of belonging to school. She will be observing the way that class members interact and participate within the class.

Script for Teachers to use when recruiting individual participants.

Fiona Picton from Flinders University is completing a study at our school that is about how students develop feelings of belonging to their school. She will be observing several students in this classroom. Would you be interested in being one of the students involved in this study? Fiona would also want to ask you some questions and would record what you have to say.

The kind of questions would be about things like how students feel about being at school, their friendships and things that they like to do at break time.

If you think you would be interested, I have an information sheet about the research to give you that you may take home to discuss with your parents. If you decide that you would like to be included in the research you and your parents will need to complete a consent form. If you later change your mind and no longer wish to be part of the research you may stop your involvement.

Appendix H: Letter for the Newsletter



MRS FIONA PICTON
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Flinders University
Flinders Drive, Bedford Park SA 5042

GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 0883732193

Fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

I would like to introduce myself to the school community. I am a Doctoral student in the Education School at Flinders University. I am happy to have the opportunity of working in your school for the next few months and I am looking forward to getting to know students and their families.

The research I will be completing will lead to the production of a thesis. The study aims to develop an understanding of how students make pathways to belonging within a South Australian Primary school. I will be working with certain classes within the school.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by e-mail Fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au.

I look forward to working in your school.

Yours sincerely

Fiona J Picton

*Mrs Fiona Picton
School of Education
Flinders University*

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix I: Letter of Introduction to Families



Flinders University

Education Department

GPO Box 2100

Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 08 83732193

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Dear Parents/Caregivers,

I would like to introduce myself to you. I am a Doctoral student in the Education School at Flinders University. I will be working in the school for the next few months and I am looking forward to getting to know students and their families.

I have been a primary school teacher in South Australia for over twenty-five years and during that time I have taught students from Reception to year seven. I am also a mum and I have three adult children. I am currently on leave from teaching so that I might complete my Doctorate studies. I have a keen interest in inclusive education and I am completing my doctoral studies on this.

The research I will be completing will lead to the production of a thesis. The study aims to develop understanding of how students make and remake pathways to belonging within a South Australian Primary school. I will be working with certain classes within the school.

I will be seeking the assistance of students and their parents to volunteer from these classes, to assist in this project. Participation in this project would involve students being observed in their classrooms and completing some individual interviews. No more than 20 minutes on 2 to 3 occasions would be required for interviews. Interviews would be tape recorded with participants' permission. Parents may be interviewed if they would like to be involved in the research.

Any information provided by students and parents will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Participants would be entirely free to discontinue their participation at any time or to decline to answer particular questions.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 0883732193 or e-mail

Fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au

I look forward to working in your school.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely

Fiona J Picton

Mrs Fiona Picton
School of Education
Flinders University

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix J: Information Sheet



Mrs Fiona Picton
School of Education
Flinders University
Flinders Drive, Bedford Park SA 5042
GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001
Tel: 0883732193

Fiona.picton@flinders.edu.au

INFORMATION SHEET

Title: Pathways to belonging. An ethnographic study of students making their way in a mainstream South Australian primary school.

Investigators:

Researcher: Mrs Fiona Picton

Education Department

Flinders University

Ph: 08 83732193

Supervisors: Dr Neil Welch

Dr Grant Banfield

Description of the study:

The study is concerned with describing and understanding how students make pathways to belonging to school culture. The researcher will seek to describe and understand what things support feelings of belonging and what things create boundaries to belonging for students. The researcher will gather data based on the perspectives, experiences and understandings of participants. The researcher will work collaboratively with teachers, parents and students, one day a week over a period of three months. This research is supported by Flinders University Education Department.

Purpose of the study:

This project aims to

- Understand how pathways to belonging evolve in mainstream school for young students.
- To illuminate what enables the evolution of pathways to belonging and what are the obstacles.
- To examine established policies and practices that shape the evolution of pathways to belonging.

What will I be asked to do?

Students who participate in the study, will be observed by the researcher in their daily school activities for several hours each week. They will also be invited to attend two or three one-on-one interviews with the researcher. The researcher will ask them some questions about school and the things that they like to do at school. The interviews will take about 20 minutes. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder to help with looking at the results. Once recorded, the interview will be transcribed (typed-up) and stored as a computer file and then destroyed once the results have been finalised. Participating in the research is voluntary and participants may withdraw from the research at any time.

What benefit will I gain from being involved in this study?

The sharing of your experiences will improve the planning and delivery of future education programs for students.

Will I be identifiable by being involved in this study?

Your participation will be kept anonymous in the written report. Once the interview has been typed-up and saved as a file, the voice file will then be destroyed. Any identifying information will be removed and the typed-up file stored on a password protected computer that only the researcher (Mrs Fiona Picton) will have access to. Your comments will not be linked directly to you.

Are there any risks or discomforts if I am involved?

The researcher anticipates few risks from your involvement in this study. If you have any concerns regarding anticipated or actual risks or discomforts, please raise them with the researcher.

If during the research a student is identified as being bullied the researcher will communicate this information to the class teacher who will take appropriate action to stop the bullying. The class teacher will inform the child's parents.

If a student becomes distressed in relation to any issues of child abuse the Mandatory reporting procedure would take precedence.

Students and parents may access the school counsellor if their involvement in the research causes them any distress.

The phone number for the school counsellor is: 84451194.

Free telephone counselling is available for parents and students, if involvement in the research causes any distress, at Lifeline Australia 131114.

How do I agree to participate?

Participation is voluntary. You may answer 'no comment' or refuse to answer any questions and you are free to withdraw from observations and interviews at any time without effect or consequences. A consent form accompanies this information sheet. If you agree to participate please read and sign the form and send it back to me at (name of school).

How will I receive feedback?

The researcher will talk with you about the major findings from the research. Major findings from the project will be summarised and given to you by the investigator if you would like them.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and we hope that you will accept our invitation to be involved.

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

Appendix K: Informed Consent Form

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM FOR CHILD PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH (by observation, interview and document analysis)

Pathways to belonging. An ethnographic study of students making their way in a mainstream South Australian primary school.

I

being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to my child participating, as requested, in the observations and interviews for the research project on how students form pathways to belonging to school within a South Australian Primary school.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my child's information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - My child may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - My child is free to withdraw from the project at any time and is free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, my child will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - Whether my child participates or not, or withdraws after participating, will have no effect on his/her progress in his/her course of study, or results gained.
 - My child may ask that the recording/observation be stopped at any time, and he/she may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage.

Participant's signature **Date**

Student Participant's signature **Date**

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name **Fiona Picton**

Researcher's signature **Date**

NB: Two signed copies should be obtained. The copy retained by the researcher may then be used for authorisation of Items 8 and 9, as appropriate.

8. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read a transcript of my participation and agree to its use by the researcher as explained.

Participant's signature **Date**

9. I, the participant whose signature appears below, have read the researcher's report and agree to the publication of my information as reported.

Participant's signature **Date**

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number 6174). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

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