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Supporting Refugee Students in Schools: What Constitutes Inclusive Education?

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Abstract

The worldwide rise in numbers of refugees and asylum seekers suggests the need to examine the practices of those institutions charged with their resettlement in host countries. In this paper we investigate the role of one important institution – schooling – and its contribution to the successful resettlement of refugee children. We begin with an examination of forced migration and its links with globalisation, and the barriers to inclusion confronting refugees. A discussion of the educational challenges confronting individual refugee youth and schools is followed by case studies of four schools and the approaches they had developed to meet the needs of young people from a refugee background. Using our findings and other research, we outline a model of good practice in refugee education. We conclude by discussing how educational institutions might play a more active role in facilitating transitions to citizenship for refugee youth through an inclusive approach.

Keywords: refugee education, schooling, globalisation, forced migration, inclusive education.

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Introduction

Global movements of people across borders have increased dramatically in recent decades, creating challenges for nation-states in maintaining social cohesion within increasingly diverse populations. Forced migration, as distinct from economic migration, has become a significant feature of these global flows, with implications for the institutions of human rights and citizenship within countries receiving refugees and asylum seekers for settlement. These changes in migratory flows have been influenced by a broader politics of neoliberalism, which has facilitated free movement of those with access to capital, such as business migrants, certain professionals, and fee paying international students. By contrast, asylum seekers and refugees are not considered a desirable part of the ethnoscape (Castles, 2003; Marfleet, 2006). With politicians in several western countries known for fuelling public animosity towards refugees and asylum seekers, understanding the reasons for forced migration, and the barriers to social inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers, is crucial for policymakers and educators.

Schools have a critical role to play in the settlement of refugee young people and in facilitating transitions to citizenship and belonging (Cassity and Gow. 2005; Christie and Sidhu, 2002). However, much of the research in the field highlights the problems and limitations in the provision of educational support for refugee students. Further, although there have been a number of publications by community organisations on how to facilitate 'good practice' in the provision of schooling for refugee youth, there have been few documented examples of effective support in Australian schools. This paper therefore aims to make a contribution towards a broader understanding of how schooling may contribute to social inclusion for refugee students, in the school and the broader community.

There are six sections in the paper. The first section discusses the links between globalisation and forced migration. Section two provides an overview of the 'refugee problem' as it is conceptualised by nation-states. Section three reviews the literature on the educational challenges confronting refugee children and the institutional responses of education authorities, highlighting the limitations and possibilities proposed by the institutions of human rights and citizenship – the two main pillars charged with ensuring the educational inclusion of refugee children. We then move on to discuss what constitutes 'good practice' in the provision of education to refugee youth in section four. Section five reports on our study of four Australian schools and the models they had developed in the provision of education for young people from a refugee background. Our analysis is based on an examination of policy documents and school prospectuses, and interviews with principals and teachers. We conclude by suggesting what an inclusive model in refugee education might look like, and how schools might contribute to new transitions to citizenship under conditions of globalisation.

Linking globalisation and forced migration

According to Castles (2003), forced migration, is 'a crucial dimension of globalisation and of the North-South relationships in the post-Cold War era' (p.14). It is now widely accepted that globalisation is a set of uneven and unequal processes, marked by inclusions and exclusions in the South and the North (Castells, 1996). Nineteenth century globalisation was marked by population mobility in response to diverse set of forces including industrialisation, colonisation, and the ethnocultural displacements accompanying nation-state formation. Twentieth century globalisation featured the end of empire, decolonisation, the continued homogenisation of pluralistic communities into national states, and in the later decades by the dissemination and adoption of economic liberalisation regimes. The end of the Cold War and the institutionalisation of neoliberalism reduced the aid commitment of wealthy states, contributed to trade imbalances and undermined nation-states in large sections of the South, notably Africa and Latin America (Hoogvelt, 2007).

For Marfleet (2006), the weakening of state structures undermined the legitimacy of governments and increased factionalised conflict. Internal wars, associated with identity struggles based on race, ethnicity, class and religion, extended to competition for scarce resources. In some instances indigenous minorities stood in the way of resource exploitation for global markets. Castles (2003, p.18) argues that Northern economic interests played a role in perpetuating local wars while also contributing to underdevelopment in the South through their trade and intellectual property regimes. Minority groups who were descendents of indentured labourers introduced to sustain the colonial plantation economy also came under attack by the political elites of decolonised states (Castles and Miller, 1998). Forced migration then has to be understood and studied in the context of *social transformations* that have emerged from earlier and present waves of globalisation.

Increasingly, those among the internally displaced who have lost faith in the international refugee processing system seek to bypass the complex and protracted international refugee processing regime by resorting to illegal means such as using people smugglers. The changed geopolitical realities arising from the end of the Cold War and the heightened security concerns of the September 11th attacks means that they are more likely to be categorised as bogus asylum seekers and economic migrants who have left voluntarily. Yet economic and political causes of migration are interrelated: political oppression and economic dislocation inform each other (Freedman, 2007). 'Failed economies generally also mean weak states, predatory ruling cliques and human rights abuses' (Castles, 2003).

Given these developments, there is an urgent need for refugee research and policy work to re-conceptualise and re-theorise the links between forced and economic migration. There is also a need for service providers and educators to understand and challenge popular understandings and media constructions of 'the refugee problem' if they are to facilitate good settlement and educational outcomes for refugees.

'The refugee problem': barriers to inclusion

International covenants and national policy frameworks provide useful indicators of the possibilities and limitations for the inclusion of refugees by host countries. The UN Refugee Convention, used by states to determine who is a genuine refugee, employs a fairly narrow definition of what constitutes a refugee - a historical limitation which can be traced to the geopolitical configuration of power during the Cold War era. The Convention was premised on a particular subjectivity for the refugee – a person escaping political persecution from Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. In the imagination of politicians, this courageous and deserving freedom fighter from a modern region (Europe) could be easily integrated into a western country. With the end of the Cold War, this positive political symbolism was replaced with negative perceptions and images. The refugee from the developing 'Third World' was seen as a subject of underdevelopment who was to be encouraged and assisted to either remain in neighbouring countries of first asylum or to return to their country of origin (see Lui, 2004, pp.128-129).

Lui (2004) notes that poor institutional capacity exists at global, national and community levels to provide displaced peoples with the economic, social and political rights as defined by the institutions of human rights and citizenship. Liberal democratic governments like those in the UK, Australia, NZ and the US are signatories of various human rights conventions. However, there is a disjunction between their espoused human rights ideals and the resettlement policies and practices that they have institutionalised for refugees. Also, having embraced neoliberal policy regimes, these formerly strong welfare states have been hollowed out. Thus while these countries provide formal access to citizenship by accepting a quota of refugees for resettlement, their settlement policies and practices create the conditions for the marginalisation of refugees and in the worst case scenarios, facilitate their slide into an underclass. Refugees also face racist and attitudinal barriers which are further impediments towards their full inclusion in society (Devere, McDermott and Verbitsky, 2006).

Citizenship scholars using a governmentality approach have highlighted the historically variable ways in which the institution of citizenship is assembled and governed, providing further insights into the complexities of the lived experiences of 'the stranger' who is formally a citizen. The exemplary citizen under contemporary neoliberal governing regimes is an individual who is self sufficient, productive, responsible and entrepreneurial. However, an individual's capacity to meet these requirements is influenced by historically determined stratifications such as race, class and gender. Furthermore, state ideologies are known for their association of race with economic performance. In the US, for example, newcomers have routinely been assessed against grids of 'whiteness' and upward social mobility, resulting in the acceptance of groups such as highly educated, Asian techno-entrepreneurs. By contrast, rural Cambodian refugees have received a less favourable response (Ong, 2003). We suggest that similar stratifications and exclusions prevail in the Australian context.

At the global level, there is no shortage of frameworks that enshrine the rights of children to have an education that is free of discrimination and responsive to their special educational and cultural needs. The 1949 UN *Declaration on Human Rights,* the 1989 *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRoC), and the Dakar *Education for All* framework affirm the rights of all children to quality education that recognises diversity and does not discriminate on the basis of gender, disability, national origin, or the political affiliations of their parents. However, these and other statements of rights have had limited impact on provision and end up having a symbolic function only (Christie and Sidhu, 2002).

The limitations of various human rights frameworks to provide for the social justice of refugees are acutely visible when we examine the assistance models adopted by aid agencies such as the UNHCR and donor governments. Their focus on short-term emergency relief instead of longer term development assistance means that the human rights of internally displaced people are compromised (Goetz, 2006). Within this context the provision of education to children in camps is a low priority (Oh and Van der Stouwe, 2008; Wrigley, 2006). In those cases where development assistance is provided to countries of first asylum and countries of origin, it is clear that many displaced people are not accorded full citizenship rights and remain on the peripheries of these societies. As a result, the educational disadvantage of refugee children in Australia can be traced to their exclusion and/or marginalisation from the educational systems of asylum countries. The small minority of refugees who are fortunate enough to be settled in western countries also suffer educational disadvantage due to the protracted time spent in refugee camps. A stay of 5-10 years in a refugee camp is common and such time frames have a devastating effect on educational development and attainment (Oh and Van der Stouwe, 2008).

Refugee education: theoretical issues

Until recently, the literature on migration has ignored the phenomenon of forced migration, and has failed to take account of the experiences of refugees as distinct from those of other migrants (Matthews, 2008; Pinson and Arnot, 2007). The particular needs of refugee students have been ignored by education policymakers and by research, which has focused on migrant and multicultural education. These exclusions - from public policy and academic research - establish the context for a lack of targeted policies and organisational frameworks to address the significant educational disadvantages confronting refugee youth. As we discuss below, the discursive invisibility of refugees in policy and research has worked against their cultural, social and economic integration.

When refugee education did begin to receive some attention, refugee students tended to be treated as a homogeneous group, and generalisations limited work in the field (McBrien, 2005; Rutter, 2006). With reference to the UK context, Rutter has argued that presenting refugees as a homogeneous group has prevented 'detailed examination of pre-migration and post-migration factors' (2006, p.4) which are relevant to understanding their particular needs and developing appropriate educational support.

The Australian literature has also failed to take account of the diverse backgrounds and circumstances of refugee students. In recent years, when most of the refugees arriving in Australia have been from various African countries, there has been a failure to take account of their different countries of origin, and their differing experiences in countries of asylum, including their educational experiences.

In their review of refugee education in the UK, Jones and Rutter (1998) commented that the limitations in education policy were unsatisfactory given the presence of some 46 000 refugee children and young people in UK schools and colleges. They argued that resources for refugee education were inadequate, and that refugee children were often seen as 'problems' - rather than having the potential to bring positive elements into the classroom. The main issues in refugee education that they identified were: delivering adequate language support; providing all students with information and understanding about refugee students' experiences; and meeting the students' psycho-social and emotional needs (Jones and Rutter, 1998). Improved English language support was especially important for those refugee students with limited (or no) basic education, to enable them to access the mainstream curriculum. Jones and Rutter acknowledged that some Local Education Authorities were working to improve refugee education, for example, by appointing 'refugee support teachers' and expanding support to include educational psychologists and social workers. More recently, Rutter (2006) has highlighted the continuing limitations in refugee education in the UK. She points to the government's 'unwillingness to be seen as being supportive of refugees' as a contributing factor to these continuing limitations, and argues that the inadequate ESL support for refugee students could be seen to be discriminatory (p.153).

In a study of policy and provision for refugee students in Australia, Sidhu and Taylors (2007) reported that refugee students were rarely targeted with a specific policy. Instead, they were either conflated with other categories such as ESL students, or not mentioned at all. Similarly, in a UK study, Arnot and Pinson (2005) found that the needs of asylum seeker and refugee children were rarely met though a specific targeted policy. They identified refugee students' needs as being in three main areas: *learning, social and emotional.* However, they found that schools tended to concentrate on ESL issues, together with emotional problems. Less attention was given to other learning needs of the students such as facilitating their access to the mainstream curriculum.

Rutter (2006) also criticised the focus on the trauma experiences of refugee children at the expense of a concern with their educational experiences by researchers and education professionals. She reported that about 76 per cent of the material included in her literature review 'comprised psychological research monographs about trauma' (2006, p.4). In her view, the construction of the refugee child 'as "traumatised" impeded a real analysis of their backgrounds and experiences, as well as masking the significance of post-migration experiences such as poverty, isolation, racism and uncertain migration status' (2006, p.5).

Similarly, with reference to Australia, it has been argued that:

> … refugee education is piecemeal and dominated by psychological approaches that over emphasise pre-displacement conditions of trauma. Preoccupation with therapeutic interventions locate issues at an individual level and overlook broader dimensions of inequality and disadvantage. (Matthews 2008, p.32)

In part, this tendency to medicalise the refugee subject can be related to funding regimes. In Queensland, the absence of a policy framework and budget support targeting refugee education, encouraged community organisations working with refugee students to access funds from mental health programmes provided by the state health department. These circumstances have continued to shape the focus of their work in schools including the information and training seminars they provide to teachers. As Wrigley (2006, p. 170) observes, 'the problem is [thus] located within the minds and bodies of those termed refugees rather than within the events that have caused their displacement or within their current experiences'. The rise of psychology as a form of expert knowledge (see Rose, 1999), the effects of evidence-based policy and neoliberal accountability regimes have all combined to create the conditions for the refugee to be categorised as a medicalised subject of trauma, and the welfare subject whose survival is reliant on the benevolence of the state.

Much of the research on refugee education in Australia has focussed on the challenges faced by refugee students and their teachers (Cassity and Gow, 2005; Miller et al., 2005). As part of a large project on globalisation and refugee education in Queensland (Taylor, 2008; Matthews, 2008), research was undertaken in four Brisbane state high schools identified as having significant numbers of refugee students. In-depth interviews were conducted with ESL teachers, principals/deputy principals, guidance officers and liaison workers. The focus of the study was on school policies and programs concerning refugee students.

The teachers interviewed were struggling to cope with the increased numbers and demands of their refugee students, who were mainly from various African countries (Author, 2008). Insufficient resources resulted in shortages in ESL and general teaching staff, and in limited professional development which might have assisted them to better meet the needs of refugees. Most attention was given to language support and to social and emotional needs, with less attention being given to other learning needs. Given that the ESL teachers were 'bearing the brunt' of the increased numbers of refugee students, it is not surprising that there was an emphasis on language support. Community sector workers provided support for the social and emotional needs of the refugees. These problems 'on the ground' in Brisbane schools seemed in part to be a result of the inadequacies in policy and provision: inadequacies which, it was claimed, led to the education of refugee students being 'left to chance' (Sidhu and Taylor, 2007).

What is 'good practice' in the provision of education for refugees?

Some recent publications from the UK (DfES, 2004; Reakes and Powell, 2004; Rutter, 2001) provide useful insights about how support for refugee young people in schools could be improved. Arnot and Pinson's (2005) survey of school policies and practices in the education of asylum seeker and refugee children by Local Education Authorities is notable for its holistic focus and empirical grounding. A review of models and 'best practice' in refugee education in New Zealand (Hamilton et al., 2005) is also available, but has been criticised for its overly psychological approach (Pinson and Arnot, 2007; Matthews, 2008).

Rutter has identified three discourses that dominate the 'good practice' literature: the importance of a welcoming environment, free of racism; the need to meet psycho-social needs, particularly if there are prior experiences of trauma; and linguistic needs (2006, p.5). She reported that, throughout the UK, local interventions were promoting refugee children's educational progress and well being. Rutter emphasised that successful interventions targeted particular groups, rather than refugee students in general, and viewed children holistically, working to meet psycho-social and learning needs.

Arnot and Pinson (2005) examined the different approaches to policy and provision in refugee education being taken by Local Education Authorities (LEAs) and schools in the UK, and the values underlying these models. They identified a *holistic model* as one which recognises the complexity of needs of asylum seeker and refugee children (ie their learning, social and emotional needs). They described case studies of three LEAs which adopted holistic models as providing examples of 'good practice'. All three LEAs regarded refugees as having multiple needs, and established support systems to meet all aspects of these needs. Further, all three case study LEAs provided a targeted system of support for refugee students (see, Arnot and Pinson, 2005, part 5). The UK good practice case studies also highlighted the importance of parental involvement, community links, and working with other agencies (p.48). In terms of school ethos, good practice schools had: 'an ethos of inclusion' and a 'celebration of diversity', 'a caring ethos and the giving of hope' (p.51). Other characteristics identified were having previous experience with culturally diverse students, and promoting positive images of asylum seeker and refugee students.

If schools are to play a key role in the refugee settlement process, positive and welcoming attitudes to refugee students would appear to be essential. Such school based change requires leadership, and ideally will be facilitated and supported by education authorities. For example, a comprehensive guide to good practice in supporting the education of asylum seeking and refugee children was published by the UK government for UK schools (DfES, 2004). However, in Australia community organisations have taken the lead in publishing useful guidelines for teachers and schools with refugee students. For example, in Queensland, a number of useful publications for schools have been published by the Queensland Programme of Support for Survivors of Torture and Trauma (QPASTT) (2001, 2007), assisted by funding from the Queensland Health Department; while in Victoria *Schools in for Refugees* was published by the Victorian Foundation for the

Survivors of Torture (2007) with support from the Victorian government. The New South Wales government's publication *Assisting Refugee Students at School* (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2003) is also well regarded.

A case study of four schools

The research for this paper was conducted in 2007 as a follow-up to the larger project on globalisation and refugee education in Queensland mentioned previously. In this smaller study, the focus of this paper, we selected four schools. This was a purposive rather than a random sample: the schools had come to our attention because of their reputations for their work with refugee students. They included one high school well known nationally for its work with refugees (School A) and located in central western Sydney, NSW, an ethnically diverse urban area which faces some social disadvantage. Here, the median individual weekly income is $417 and is below the national average of $466. Some 42.8 % of its population were born overseas (ABS 2006).

The other schools in our sample were three Catholic schools in Brisbane, Queensland: one primary school in a south-side suburb where a large population of newly arrived African refugees had settled (School B); one inner city high school (School C); and one high school in the outer northern suburbs which was accessible by train from suburbs closer to the city (School D). School B is located in a southern inner urban suburb which is the site of on-arrival accommodation facilities for refugees provided by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The suburb's median weekly income in of $ 527 exceeds that of the national average ($466) and approximately 24% of its population were born overseas. (ABS 2006). School C is located in a central business district and enrols students from across the metropolitan area. It has a reputation for inviting students who face academic challenges. At the same time, it also attracts those who do well academically. School D is located in an inner north urban area, with 20% of its population born overseas where the median individual weekly income is $588 (ABS 2006).

These schools reflect the diversity of the Catholic education system in Australia, which is known to recruit students from a broad section of the Australian population. This means that even academically elite Catholic schools seek to welcome educationally disadvantaged refugee students. Individual schools, like those in our sample, are known to work closely with the local parish to support refugee families.

Following Arnot and Pinson (2005), we were interested in how schools met the needs of refugee students and the values which underpinned the schools' approaches. We conducted informal interviews with the principals and with key support staff, such as ESL teachers, and also examined school prospectuses and newsletters. Interviews were semi-structured, approximately one hour in duration, and were audio recorded and later transcribed. The focus of the interviews was on the approaches, programs and strategies which had been used in the school, and the factors which, in the view of relevant staff, had assisted in

the successful integration of refugee students. Because our focus was on school programs and strategies, students were not interviewed.

In the remainder of this section we identify features associated with the successful support of refugee students in the schools that we visited. We have drawn on Arnot and Pinson's (2005) report to document our findings; however we have modified their framework to highlight significant issues which emerged in our research.

Targeted policy and system support

Our study confirmed that targeted policies are crucial to address the educational disadvantages of refugee young people. Without such policies and accompanying budget support, individual schools and staff experience tremendous difficulties in translating social justice ideals into practical programmes of support for refugee youth. In short, in the absence of targeted policy and system support the effectiveness of settlement and schooling and, by extension, their contribution to the economic and social rights of new citizens is compromised.   For School A, the New South Wales government's Priority Schools Program, an equity program, was pivotal in providing resources for literacy support, and for welfare and advocacy activities. Also funded through this Program were school-based cultural understanding projects, experiential excursions and various support programs to orient refugee students and their families to Australian life.

In Queensland, the state education department had no defined policy targeting refugees, although small amounts of funding was available for ESL support for refugee students through a complex submission-based allocative model. The most significant source of ESL funding for Queensland schools was the federal (Commonwealth) government's New Arrivals Program which targets migrants and refugees.

Queensland's Catholic schools also have access to the New Arrivals Program funds for ESL support which is distributed on a needs basis through the Queensland Catholic Education Commission. Some schools have access to additional funds, for example, to employ liaison officers and tuition subsidies such as the Human Rights Education fund. The organisational structure of the Queensland's Catholic education sector frees schools from spending lots of time navigating the bureaucracy of funding: the Catholic Education Commission does the paper work, rather than the individual schools. The principal of one Catholic high school expressed the view that it was preferable for them to be affiliated with Brisbane Catholic Education even though they were an independent school, as this support enabled them to carry out their social justice work: 'We have more bargaining power and access to support. So our funding for refugees comes through them' (Principal, School D). This principal said that these affiliations also enabled better support to be provided to Indigenous students.

In contrast to Education Queensland, Brisbane Catholic Education has developed a specific Strategy for Refugee Students as part of its current ESL Strategic Plan (Brisbane Catholic Education, 2005). This plan highlights the need for a strategic

approach to the enrolment and support of refugee learners and their families in Brisbane Catholic Education schools, and outlines strategies for system level support, school level support, family support and support from the local community. For example, an ESL New Arrival Officer works with refugee families on arrival and an ESL Secondary Cluster Teacher assists refugee students with the transition from primary to high school. In addition, Brisbane Catholic Education has developed detailed guidelines to assist schools in supporting the diverse learning and social needs of refugee students in Brisbane Catholic Schools (see, Fraine and McDade, 2009).

Commitment to social justice

One issue which we identified as being particularly significant in all the schools we visited was an explicit commitment to social justice. The Arnott and Pinson (2005) study was concerned with the values and ethos of the schools, and in our study, social justice emerged as a key factor influencing the approach taken to supporting the educational needs of their refugee students.

School A promoted values of respect, acceptance and responsibility for all:

> These are seen as enabling principles. Equity is embedded in the school culture in a dynamic way … English speaking students need to understand differences in values and that people have different experiences'. (Principal, School A)

The other schools referred to their mission statements and ethos:

> We have a Mission Statement that says that we will celebrate diversity, value uniqueness and support cultural and linguistic diversity
> … (Principal, School B)
>
> … our mission and values [to support social justice] are explicit and they are central planks in our documents, in our planning, organisation, particularly our enrolment policy in terms of our curriculum access structures. (Deputy Principal, School C)
>
> The Catholic ethos requires schools to attend to issues of disadvantage. We would be the archetype in terms of why our schools began. (Principal, School D)

This commitment was also evident in the Catholic school prospectuses:

> Social justice for every student
> [School C] celebrates an enormous diversity of cultures within its school family. Each student is encouraged to be proud of their heritage and actively embrace appreciation and tolerance of others. We create an environment where acknowledgement and acceptance are underlying values …. (Prospectus, School C)

The young women at [School D] are drawn from as many as 70 cultures and the College is richer for the gifts each culture contributes to our community. ….
Our College community is laying the foundation for the transformation of society in general and the elimination of oppression and injustice. Our inclusive curriculum accommodates the diverse voices and perspectives of all students in the classroom. (Prospectus, School D)

A holistic approach to education and welfare

Arnot and Pinson identified a holistic model as one which recognises the complexity of needs of asylum seeker and refugee children. Similarly, the schools in our study established comprehensive support systems to address the learning, social and emotional needs of refugee students and those of their families:

So it's not just academic, a lot of it is personal support as well. …If you spend enough time building up personal relationships with kids in informal ways then you get further with the kids …so the more likely it is that you're going to be able to help them academically as well as getting them in and keeping them here and supporting them and their families, because we spend a lot of time talking to their families as well. (Teacher, School C)

There is a need for us to take a holistic view on wellness. In the West there is a view that if you ameliorate educational disadvantage other things will flow from that. But this is not the case with refugee youth - we may need to start the other way around.
(Principal, School B)

School A had established a trust fund for the post-school education of asylum seeker and refugee young people, while a Student Assistance Scheme provided students with material assistance for clothing, food, educational materials and excursions. Holistic approaches to support were also used by the other schools in our study. For example, there was a Homework Centre at School C staffed by teachers who stayed after school to assist the students, and there was a separate house on the campus of School D which functioned as a Learning Support Centre. Refugee students, international students and Indigenous students were among those who used the Centre.

Also relevant to their holistic approach was the fostering by schools of links with the community, and inter-agency collaborations. In all the schools interpreters were used to provide key information in different languages, and teacher aides and liaison staff worked with parents and the broader community. School B had organised a fortnightly mothers club at the school, and had produced a kit and DVD on 'Primary school in Australia'. One principal (School A) expressed the view that it was important to empower parents to participate in their children's

education, and viewed her advocacy and educational role as extending to parents.

Along with targeting refugee populations in policies aimed at reducing educational inequalities, schools must be resourced to respond holistically to the needs of refugee youth so as to prepare them to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights as citizens.

 Leadership

We have discussed the importance of leadership at the system level. For effective support to occur there also needs to be strong leadership in the school. The principals of the schools in the study were all strong advocates for their refugee students. One teacher spoke of the importance of a leader who is 'supportive and takes initiatives, who sometimes guides and sometimes coerces, and who supports staff to take on challenges' (Teacher, School A).

In the Catholic school sector, the school principals did not consider having a proportionally higher number of refugee students as problematic:

> One of the things that we have been quite strong about is that this is a school for all and we are the local Catholic school. We happen to have in the area a high proportion of refugees. If anyone was ever to say to me, 'you have a lot of African students and I am not sure I want to enrol here', I would say, 'We are the local Catholic school and you might have noticed that this is the community we serve'. (Principal, School B)

The principal of School A viewed advocacy as a critical dimension of creating a culture of inclusion. At the time the research was being conducted, a punitive government policy was in place to discourage people from seeking asylum in Australia. The school was working closely to support unaccompanied minors on Temporary Protection Visas who were being pressured by the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs to leave the country. Teachers also accompanied families on to hearings of the Refugee Review Tribunal to put their case for Permanent Protection Visas. The principal saw advocacy as an important and practical way to demonstrate that the school cared about the student: 'Schools must play a role as people are so disempowered' (Principal, School A).

Two other principals responded to negative political and media representations of refugees and asylum seekers by writing responses in their school newsletters. One sent a collective letter from the school to the then Minister of Immigration and the local MP who had made negative comments about 'African refugees':

> We wrote about our experience of working alongside people from Sudan. I wrote that Sudanese parents worked at working bees, at tuckshop, at our school fete, attended assemblies ... and had the same hopes as other parents that their children would succeed in learning ... and take their

place in a society that I hoped was as inclusive as it could be. (Principal, School B)

The other principal wrote in the school newsletter:

> I, as one spokesperson for [School D] repudiate completely the remarks made by [the] Immigration Minister when he negatively branded African refugees as being problematic because of their difficulties in assimilating into this country. … May I make it plain that the Sudanese young women we are privileged to have in our community are a gift … To them and their families may I say that I am embarrassed by the Minister's comments, I stand apart from them and I regret his words were ever spoken. (Principal, School D, in newsletter, October 2007)

Related to leadership within the school, and also to a holistic approach, a whole school approach was a feature of the four schools.

> There is that beautiful balance between being integrated in the classroom and feeling welcome in that sense, and also having that extra support at both a personal and academic level … Students are integrated from the outset and made to feel welcome from the moment they step through the gates, and also in addition [they] have those extra support networks to stand with them but not to segregate them or exclude them. (Teacher, School C)

> It's hard to narrow down the support team because seriously the whole school is the support. (Teacher, School C)

An inclusive approach

The Arnot and Pinson (2005) study identified 'an ethos of inclusion' and the 'celebration of diversity' as important characteristics of what they termed 'good practice schools'. Here, we acknowledge that the term 'good practice' is not unproblematic. We use the term 'good practice' in this paper in the same way as Arnot and Pinson, whose model we are applying, to describe successful programmes of support for refugee students which enable their inclusion in the school and broader community. In the section that follows, we include responses from the schools in our study which constitute an ethos of inclusion:

> I think the way staff model their behaviour is important, because there has to be a culture of inclusion, not just a practice. (Principal, School B)

> The approach is to mainstream diversity - diversity in education principles – to help every student in the school. (Principal, School D)

Some responses focused on more practical concerns in regard to the curriculum, the organisation of the school and the provision of information. The schools did not separate out refugee young people, but saw them as part of the multicultural and diverse fabric of the school.

> The curriculum offered at [School D] is a student-centred, inclusive curriculum which is designed to provide a learning environment and structure suitable for the whole range of students. (Prospectus, School D)

One school had responded to the increase in refugee students in the school by adopting an inclusive approach to teaching and learning, first by providing intensive language and learning support and then by incorporating refugee children into mainstream classrooms as soon as they had acquired basic literacy skills: 'We have adapted to a different educational focus with the whole idea of including children in classrooms' (Principal, School B). This enabled the students to access the mainstream curriculum and be part of the school community. To reduce communication difficulties for newly arrived refugee families, this primary school used visual resources to provide information: 'We started an orientation programme [in] pictorial form. We used a power point. We had pictures of things like a clock, which said when school starts, and when to pick up' (Principal, School B).

Arnot and Pinson (2005) found that their 'good practice' schools promoted positive images of asylum seeker and refugee students. As seen in our earlier discussion of advocacy, the schools in our study were keen to counter negative views of refugees. One principal said that they needed to see the presence of refugees in the school, 'as a gift rather than as a deficit: in a faith community that might be easier' (Principal, School B). Another said: 'our school is enriched and challenged by having them here' and, recognising their resilience, added: 'if these people have been resourceful enough to survive what they have, we have so much to learn from them' (Principal, School D).

It is probably also relevant to their successful adoption of an inclusive approach that three of the schools had previous experience with culturally diverse students. For example, one teacher commented: '… as a school we've always been very multicultural' (Teacher, School C). One principal spoke of the school's history of educating migrants and refugees:

> … our tradition goes back to post World War 2 – this has been a place where people have made their home – from post-war migration and then people from Asia, Central America. It is almost as if we have people from the hot spots of the world. And our records show that in 1949 there were families whose records showed their address to be migrant camps. (Principal, School B)

Support for learning needs

As seen in the literature review, there has been emphasis on language needs of refugee students, often given in withdrawal classes, at the expense of other learning needs. The schools in our study with supportive programmes for refugee students adopted a whole-of-school approach to learning assistance. In instances where withdrawal was used to provide intensive support for refugee

students, resources were made available to enable their integration of students into mainstream classrooms:

> [The school's] educational philosophy rests on providing excellent learning support and very good education programmes. The mindset and pedagogy arising from this filters to the whole school. Creating excellent learning support programmes is not viewed as costly as it is seen as creating professional expertise within school. (Principal, School D)

In the schools with successful programmes of support, ESL teachers were not marginalised, they were well integrated, worked with the rest of the school and were contributors to the key learning areas. For example: 'they co-teach with the class teacher rather than withdrawing the child from the mainstream class' (Principal, School D). In this school the Learning Support team consisted of 1 full time Learning Support/Learning Enrichment teacher, 1 full time ESL, and 2 part-time ESL teachers that had expertise in teaching refugees. 'Their task is to work very closely with the girls and to cocoon them, build trust, and then work out individualised programmes' (Principal, School D).

Social justice issues were addressed through the curriculum in School A. This school also offered ESL English as an accredited subject, and had introduced Australian Cultural Studies (an ESL subject) in years 9 and 10. In the two Brisbane Catholic secondary schools ESL English was being trialled.

> The ESL and Learning Enrichment teachers come under the English and Creative Arts faculty - they are part of the English teaching team. [School D] is trialling ESL English as a Board subject in 2008. ESL has become an integrated curriculum item. (Principal, School D)

One school referred to the importance of establishing clear indicators of success which did not focus purely on academic achievements:

> Every kid will leave school with a sense of their own dignity as a person, with some work skills and the ability to get on in society. 70% of the young people who leave year 12 go into some kind of full time education including TAFE. (Principal, School A)

Working with other agencies

All the schools were engaged in partnerships with community organisations which assisted in supporting refugee students' social and emotional needs. These partnerships were essential to maintaining a holistic approach to supporting refugee students. As one principal explained:

> So the partnerships we build with QPASTT [Queensland Program of Assistance to Survivors of Torture and Trauma], Transcultural Mental Health and the Mater [Hospital] have really been because we needed to support our learners. We did not make a formal approach; we just asked them 'Can you help us? We need help'. (Principal, School B)

School A was working in partnership with multicultural resource centres, the NSW Department of Community Services, Centrelink, the Ethnic Communities Council, STARTTS [Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors] and other local welfare agencies: 'Most schools, and not just those involving refugees, have engagement with various welfare agencies. Links happen at the local level (Principal, School A).

Discussion and implications

We argued earlier that the goal of securing social justice for refugee youth has been compromised by the institutions of human rights and citizenship. The pre-migration experiences of refugee youth in refugee camps highlight the limitations of the international human rights regime institutionalised by the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1951 Refugee Convention. It is clear then that the validation of human rights agreements and the extension of formal citizenship rights are not by themselves sufficient to ensure social inclusion in the full and substantive sense. Liberal democratic societies claim an impressive record in defending negative rights and freedoms – namely freedom from discrimination arising from civil and political oppression. However, if we consider the experiences of refugees accepted for resettlement in countries like Australia, the protection of positive freedoms - specifically social, economic and cultural rights - is less evident. Refugees face attitudinal barriers and racism, which militate against good settlement outcomes. The medicalisation of refugees as subjects of trauma is an additional problem in that it may compound their marginalisation by relegating people who have been resilient survivors to welfare dependency. Given this context, schools face significant challenges if they are to contribute positively towards inclusion of refugee students in their new country of settlement.

The study that informed this paper was a small-scale project which did not seek to investigate the outcomes that school-based programmes of support represented for individual students from a refugee background. Thus, our findings, summarised below, are necessarily tentative and inconclusive in relation to the role of settlement and schooling in transitions to citizenship. Further research is needed to explore these issues in more depth. In identifying successful practices to support the schooling of refugee youth, the features that emerged as being particularly important were *school ethos* and an *inclusive approach.* This involved finding an appropriate balance between providing support for the special needs of the refugee students without 'othering' them. In addition, the espoused *commitment to social justice* by the schools meant that there was an expectation of acceptance of 'the stranger' (Pinson and Arnot, 2007) by all members of the school community including parents and students. Our initial observation in the Queensland context is that the Catholic education system seems to enable and foster greater diversity of school cultures and missions. This is in keeping with segments within the broader Australian Catholic movement which have been strong advocates of social justice in areas ranging from education to welfare provision and Indigenous rights.

Other significant characteristics of the schools we investigated were a targeted policy and system support for refugee students, a holistic approach to their education and welfare, parental and community involvement, and working with community agencies. These features were also documented by Arnot and Pinson (2005) in their study of good practice in the education of refugees and asylum seeker students in the UK. In addition, we found that leadership and a whole school approach were significant factors in our study. The principals in the schools that we visited were strong advocates of their refugee students, and had gone out of their way to promote positive images of refugee students within the school and local community (see also, Arnot and Pinson, 2005; Reakes and Powell, 2004).

As we have indicated, international movement of peoples and diversity of national populations have posed challenges for education systems in recent years. Rather than separating 'students at risk' from the mainstream system in order to meet their educational needs as in the past, education systems and schools now aspire to deal with student diversity through inclusive education. Inclusive education is about valuing and responding to diversity, and ensuring that schools are supportive and engaging places for all students (Education Queensland, 2005).

The term 'inclusive education' was initially used in relation to the integration of students with disabilities into regular classrooms. However, in recent years it has taken on a broader usage in response to the increasing diversity within school communities, including cultural and linguistic diversity. Accordingly, most Australian state governments have developed policies to address such diversity. For example, South Australia's Multiculturalism Policy Statement refers to the commitment to provide education and care practices which: 'establish, maintain and value culturally and linguistically inclusive learning environments' (DECS, 1996, p.3).

The Tasmanian Department of Education (2008, p.1) states: 'Inclusive education means that all students in a school, regardless of their differences, are part of the school community and can feel that they belong. The mandate to ensure access, participation and achievement for every student is taken as given'. A set of principles outlined in the statement reflects many of the features which were apparent in our case study schools. They include:

- a curriculum that is accessible to all students working together
- a safe and supportive school community where all students are genuinely valued and respected
- students' social and emotional needs, as well as their intellectual needs, are responded to
- social connectedness and a feeling of belonging for all students
- a systematic approach to ensuring that the practices of inclusive education are embedded, sustained and evaluated. (Tasmanian Education Department, 2008, p.1, modified)

Inclusive education is also important in building social cohesion, and it is relevant to the concerns of this paper that Queensland's statement links inclusive experiences of schooling with citizenship issues:

> To become active and productive citizens in a just and democratic society, students need to experience democracy in the classrooms and in school organisation. Throughout all phases of learning, students need the opportunity to be part of the decision-making of their school communities. Students need opportunities to negotiate the curriculum and assessment and to practise reflective (and responsible) citizenship in their classroom and in their communities. (Education Queensland, 2005, p.5)

We were not able to investigate this aspect in the case study schools, though the strong links the schools had with their communities, and with community organisations, would be relevant to the development of responsible citizenship. We suggest that this aspect is important for successful transitions to citizenship for refugee students - after the early stages of settlement and an initial emphasis on transitions to belonging.

In conclusion, Pinson and Arnot have called for the exploration of the 'new relationships between diversity, pluralism and global/national citizenship' and their implications for education (2007, p.405). They argue, drawing on Turton (2003), that forced migration requires us to rethink issues concerning citizenship and to ask 'what our responsibility is to the stranger on the doorstep'. In terms of the educational implications they suggest that:

> … one can argue that the task of exploring educational responses to refugee and asylum-seeking children could tell us something about our education system, its inclusivity and cohesion and about how we understand the effects of globalisation on education and social change. In a way, refugee and asylum-seeking children and their integration represent a litmus test in terms of social inclusion. As the absolute stranger, the asylum seeking child could tell us something about how we define education and its role in society. (Pinson and Arnot, 2007, p.405)

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