Schools, teachers and community:
Cultivating the conditions for engaged student learning

Abstract: This paper reveals the nature of the actions, discussions and relationships which characterised teachers' and associated school personnel's efforts to engage poor and refugee students through a community garden located in a school in a low socio-economic urban area in south-east Queensland, Australia. After Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), these actions, discussions and relationships are described as both revealing and producing particular 'practice architectures' which help constitute conditions for practice – in this case, conditions for beneficial student learning. The paper draws upon interview data with teachers, other school staff and community members working in the school to reveal the inter-relating actions, discussions and relationships involved in developing and using the garden for academic and non-academic purposes. By better understanding such inter-relationships as practice architectures, the paper reveals how teachers and those in schooling settings learn to facilitate student learning practices likely to assist some of the most marginalised students in schooling settings.

Keywords: school-community relations; refugees; teachers; practice

Introduction

This paper explores the conditions which contributed to providing productive educational experiences for school students living and learning under challenging material conditions in Australia. Specifically, the paper reveals the actions, language and relationships of teachers, other school and community members involved in developing and enacting a community garden project in a multicultural school serving a large proportion of refugee students in a low socio-economic status (SES) suburban community in a metropolitan city in the state of Queensland. The paper construes the actions, language and relationships of, and between, teachers and members of the local community as essential for cultivating the sort of conditions which enable teachers and other educators to develop curriculum opportunities to more effectively engage poor and refugee students in

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learning. Such opportunities help to 'remake' the challenging material, political and socio-cultural circumstances in which many students find themselves.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (and after the UN 1951 Refugee Convention), a refugee is someone who:

> owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his [sic] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself [sic] of the protection of that country. (UNHCR 2013)

By virtue of their age, and in accordance with the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child (under 18 years of age), many refugees are deemed to be eligible to attend schools in Australia. This includes students who are of approximately primary-age (5 to 13), as reported in this research. However, teachers and others in schooling settings struggle to understand these students' needs, including needs pertaining to their cultural and historical background, the nature of the displacement factors which have influenced their lives (including issues around interrupted schooling), literacy in their mother-tongue, and whether they have experienced forms of trauma and torture (Matthews 2008). Compounding these concerns are the relative under-funding and poor resourcing of English as a Second Language. Under such circumstances, having the opportunity to engage in anti-oppressive forms of schooling, such as whole-school approaches which place issues of identity at the centre of schooling arrangements, and which involve

community outreach and cultural awareness, is essential (Pugh, Every and Hattam 2012). Examples of such anti-oppressive practices include engaging in processes of self-determination in which students have the opportunity to influence curriculum they experience, recognising and valuing the knowledges which these students bring with them to school (Bishop 2012). Other school-based practices which have been successful with refugee students have included distributed leadership models involving students, teachers and community members, providing targeted professional development for teachers and making localised changes to central curriculum (Pugh *et al.* 2012). Such approaches complement classroom practices focused upon: caring for students as culturally located individuals; having high expectations; managing classrooms for learning; undertaking detailed discursive learning interactions with students; employing a range of strategies for promoting learning interactions; collaboratively promoting, monitoring and reflecting upon students' learning outcomes, and; sharing this knowledge with students (Bishop, O'Sullivan & Berryman (2010). (Also, see Taylor and Sidhu 2012).

Within the relevant educational literature more broadly, there is some attention given to the importance of the broader community conditions, and school/teacher-community relationships which attend the learning of students from marginalised backgrounds. This includes advocacy for 'culturally relevant pedagogy' approaches – approaches which do not constitute varied cultural characteristics as somehow 'different' or 'lacking' in relation to more 'mainstream' approaches, but instead actively seek to value cultural identity whilst simultaneously challenging inequality in schooling settings (Ladson-

Billings 1995). It is also evident in support for the specific 'funds of knowledge' – home and community resources which students bring with them to school as a result of membership of particular social groups, and the activities and actions of the families and communities of which they are an integral part, and from which they learn so much (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005). Ladwig (2010) argues that these efforts need to be grounded in the realities of students' lived practice, so as to prevent well-meaning advocacy which is not cognisant of actual realities. That is, the communities within which students live and learn matter.

There are also instances and examples of how the conditions within which students learn can foster much more proactive and productive pedagogical practices (Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard 2006) and quality teaching approaches, even as schools struggle to be sites of genuinely inclusive and educative practices. Some of these practices relate specifically to the provision of schooling experiences which value and validate students' cultural backgrounds, and critique systemic prejudices and injustices (Ladson-Billings 2009).

In the Australian context, from which this research is drawn, Hattam and Zipin (2009) provide useful insights into such conditions in teachers' efforts to engage with low SES students through the 'Redesigning Pedagogies in the North' project (RPiN). The initiative involved teachers collaborating with university researchers and students to design curriculum to improve the inter-relations between students' lives and their learning. This involved a different methodological approach – or 'methodo-logic'

(Hattam, Brennan, Zipin and Comber 2009) – which entailed teachers employing research practices as a means of improving connections between students' own experiences or lifeworlds, and the school curriculum. Thomson (2006) also reports on teachers' efforts to foreground local place as a means of engaging disaffected young people with the academic and non-academic curriculum in marginal circumstances in the Australian state of Tasmania. Through various school-community partnerships, students in struggling, typically low socio-economic communities in Tasmania became involved in various community-related activities, including working with a local agricultural show (county fair) committee to renew facilities; exploring the local history of students' communities to better understand key national historical events (e.g. World War I), and; participating with local community members to restore native bushland, and develop a joint school-community art exhibition. Kamler and Comber (2005) also provide useful insights into how collaboration between teachers and researchers from universities in the states of Victoria and South Australia led to the redesign of educational experiences for at-risk students. Teachers reworked the curriculum and their classroom teaching practices in ways which built upon students' existing abilities and knowledge of popular culture, and technology.   Such 'pedagogies of reconnection' challenge more deficit-oriented approaches, and are a product of teachers' efforts to inquire into the nature of students' schooling experiences and teachers' efforts to engage students (Comber & Kamler, 2004).

In relation to refugee education in Australia in particular, Taylor and Sidhu (2012) reveal successful instances of schooling practices. Rather than being assessed as 'lacking'

against 'grids of "whiteness" and upward social mobility' (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012, p. 42) as often characterises understandings of refugees and immigrant others (Ong, 2003), successful schools engaged in practices which fostered active participation and engagement on the part of students. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) summarise these schooling practices as including: targeted policy and system support; commitment to social justice; a holistic approach to education and welfare; strong leadership at the school level; a genuinely inclusive approach; support for learning needs, and; working with other agencies (pp. 46-52).

Similarly, Naidoo (2012) describes how community, non-government organizations and universities can work with schools to assist in addressing the educational needs of refugee students. Through tutoring provided by university students who are themselves neophyte teachers engaging in pre-service teacher education programs, the Refugee Action Support program in western Sydney assists high school refugee students to engage in additional tutoring support to help improve their understanding of the school curriculum, and English language/literacy more generally. In this instance, the university is construed as a community resource to assist in facilitating improved engagement between schools and students, including as a vehicle for professional development of staff: 'As community partners, universities play an important and unique role. They have the potential to increase the collaborative capacity of the key stakeholders through the provision of professional development' (Naidoo, 2012, p. 5).

Finally, Pugh, Every and Hattam (2012) refer more explicitly to whole-school reform in a primary school in the state of South Australia, Australia, to reveal how one school served the needs of refugee students. This included support provided through various structural reforms, Pugh *et al.* (2012), including: additional funding provided for refugee students as they entered mainstream classrooms; the offering of playgroups, English classes, women's groups, and cooking classes for parents and school-community members more generally; the employment of Community Liaison Officers to liaise with parents, and Bilingual School Support Officers for parents and students, and; opportunities for ongoing discussions amongst teachers about their work with refugee students.

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While this existing research provides some glimpses into the nature of the social conditions – within and beyond schooling settings – which influence students' learning, and highlights the need for increased attention to such conditions, understanding how these initiatives came about, and the *intricacies* of their enactment, are areas for further investigation. In addition, seeking to explore how local communities serve as resources for students' learning in schooling settings serving large numbers of refugee students is an area for further exploration and inquiry. Specifically, it is productive to explore the inter-relating actions, language and relationships amongst teachers and other school and community personnel involved in establishing and enacting more productive conditions under these circumstances. It is the elaboration of such an approach to which the next section is devoted.

Practice, praxis and 'practice architectures'

In their efforts to articulate a more productive and ethically-informed conception of educational practice – education as *praxis* – Kemmis and Smith (2008) argue for an increased focus upon educational activity which has genuine, long-term benefits for both the individual and the broader society within which, and as part of which, all individuals are necessarily situated. This praxis is described as a particular kind of action – an ethical practice designed to effect improvements in the broader social world in which this action takes place:

> [Praxis] is action that is *morally-committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field.* It is the kind of action people are engaged in when they think about what their action will mean *in the world. Praxis* is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them at a particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what it is *best* to do, they *act* (Kemmis and Smith 2008: 4; emphasis original).

Drawing upon MacIntyre's (1983) conception of the virtues in classical antiquity, for such action to be praxis, it must relate to what is determined as the specific 'goods' intrinsic to the practice. Furthermore, these goods must be constantly renewed in light of the particular circumstances and conditions within which it is hoped they will exert influence. That is, they must be critiqued in light of the broader social context within which they are enacted. An action can only be considered praxis if it takes into account

the interests of not only the individual student, but also the broader needs of society and the wider world.

Importantly, such actions are not simply individualistic decontextualised undertakings, perhaps involving one or a number of individuals or groups acting regardless of circumstance. Rather, such actions are both product and productive of the broader circumstances or conditions within which they are enacted. Whilst some theorists of professional practice conceive of practice in terms of professional practice knowledge as the prerogative of individual actors and agents, such an approach downplays the sociality of practice, and how this knowledge development and understanding is heavily dependent upon the particular circumstances and conditions within which these individuals and groups of practitioners engage in their practice (see Green (2009) for a useful overview of different approaches to professional practice theory). Kemmis (2011) argues for a broader conception of professional practice which takes into account not just the individual features of practice, but what he describes as the extra-individual features as well. Drawing upon Schatzki (2002), Lave and Wenger (1991), and Wenger (1998), Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) refer to these circumstances or conditions as 'practice architectures'. These practice architectures are described as particular material-economic, cultural-discursive, and socio-political features which give rise to, and which are the product of, particular actions, language and relationships. These features are derived from the more individualistic theorising of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger's (1998) notion of 'learning architectures', and the more social theoretically informed work of Theodore Schatzki (2002).

Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) seek to bring together understandings of good practice as praxis, and notions of learning as enabled by various 'learning architectures', but in a more overtly socially aware manner. Like Schatzki's conception of social action and practices, such an approach argues in favour of practices as composed of particular 'sayings' and 'doings'. However, Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) go one step further, arguing that practices are also productive of and influenced by not only what individuals and groups say and do, but also the nature of relationships which exist. For Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008), these 'sayings', 'doings' and 'relatings' constitute particular types of 'architectures', and these architectures influence the entire nature of any given practice. Consequently, they refer to the conditions which are both product and productive of particular doings, sayings and relatings as 'practice architectures'. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) argue that these doings, sayings and relatings give rise to particular material-economic (doings), cultural-discursive (sayings) and socio-political (relatings) conditions which influence how practices are enacted at particular sites; a necessarily dialectical relationship exists between practices and the conditions of and for practice.

Importantly, these practice architectures are not meant to be understood as deterministic. Rather, they are actively engaged by those involved:

> These practice architectures are, in general, *constructed* by people inside and outside an organisation, institution or setting. ... The notion of 'practice architectures' invites us to think of practice settings like schools and classrooms

as *designed* – even if only partly so, and even if the designs cannot anticipate or account for the actual world of learning and teaching that will take place in a particular school, college, university or other learning setting (p. 58; emphasis original).

Consequently practices are recognised as capable of changing at the same time as they are influenced by the particular conditions in which they unfold. It is the way in which learning opportunities in a particular school were 'constructed' by teachers and other school and community personnel in relation to a school-based community garden in south-east Queensland, Australia, which is the focus of attention of this paper.

Context: 'Southern Cross[1]' Primary School

'Southern Cross' Primary (elementary) School is situated within a low socio-economic community in the southern suburbs of a large metropolitan city in south-east Queensland. With an enrolment of approximately 250 students, the school serves a culturally rich population with a significant proportion of students from more than 23 different nationalities, and more than 70% of students speaking at least one of more than 26 different languages at home. In recent years, many of these students have come from refugee backgrounds, and arrived in Australia after experiencing significant violence and political persecution in their countries of origin, including Rwanda, Sudan, Burundi, Congo, Afghanistan and Burma.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms.

As a low socio-economic status (SES) school, Southern Cross Primary has been the recipient of the Australian federal government's National Partnerships programme, involving the provision of additional funding to schools to help improve literacy and numeracy outcomes. The school's relative disadvantage is reflected in a range of statistics, including the considerably lower-than-average median household income for this community - $806.00/week as compared with $1234.00/week for Australia as a whole (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012).

In spite of its relative disadvantage, and as a school serving large numbers of refugee students, the school sought to organise itself in ways to engage students in more substantive learning, rather than simply implementing systems and personnel to improve standardised literacy and numeracy results. To this end, the school utilised money provided through the local district office as part of a 'Community Partnerships' initiative to employ additional personnel to help teachers develop more engaging curriculum with students, and to improve communication and collaboration between the community and school. To this end, two positions were developed – a Cultural Development Officer, who worked with teachers and support staff in the context of students' learning needs, and a Community Development Officer who liaised more closely with the community to ascertain family and student needs more broadly, and assisted community members to access social support services within the community to assist in redressing more fundamental needs.

Engagement between both Officers, teachers and members of the local community, led to support for a school-based community garden as a vehicle for community-members to show others how to produce food, and to learn more about local garden food production. As a result, a garden was established for and by the community within the grounds of the school, but on the understanding the garden would also be used by students and teachers. In this way, the garden was a multifaceted intervention which served as a conduit between families whose children attended the school, students and teachers at the school, and members of the community in the area more generally.

Methods

While recognition of changed practices as praxis was not itself evident to the participants *per se*, such recognition was evident to the researchers, and notions of praxis and practice architectures considered useful theoretical resources to elaborate in relation to how teachers and other school personnel engaged with students and the community. Consequently, the research process involved the researchers actively interpreting the data to identify whether and how changed practices (praxis) were evident at the specific school site. Through actively interpreting the data in light of changed practices, and changed conditions for practice – practice architectures – key themes were highlighted. These themes pertained to the action of establishing the garden; the nature of school-community connections/relations over time, and; how learning experiences within the formal and informal curriculum were enhanced by supporting/'talking up' the garden, and incorporating it into teachers' planning and students' learning experiences. Within

each of these themes, the 'sayings' (discourse), 'doings' (actions), and 'relatings' (relationships) were explicitly delineated to reveal how specific participants contributed to the development of productive educational conditions for refugee and other poor students.

The research presented is based primarily upon a series of interviews with key teachers,,other school and system personnel, students and community members with intimate knowledge of the garden who supported its establishment. This included 13 interviews with key personnel and teachers within the school and district who helped facilitate the development of the garden, and/or encouraged its use within the school, and six focus group interviews with students. Focus groups comprised between four and six students.

Interview questions asked included:

> How did the school-community garden come to be established within the school?
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> Who were key personnel involved in establishing the garden within the school and wider community?
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> What was the nature of teachers and these key figures' involvement, including the nature of the activities orchestrated by these people?
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> How did key personnel talk about the garden and what was the nature of the discourses which characterised the garden?
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> What were the relationships which became established over time, and how were these relationships fostered?

What was the nature of the formal and informal curriculum established as a result of the development and use of the garden?

What were the effects of the garden upon teachers, students and community members?

What was the nature of the learning which transpired for teachers, members of the community and students as a result of engagement with the garden?

Three classroom observations were also made of students undertaking work associated with the garden, and a series of observations of students interacting in the garden during class-time, and at lunch-times. These observations were between 30 minutes and one hour and included students participating in formal classroom activities (involving substantial time allocated to 'initiate-respond-evaluate' sequences of questioning of students about the nature of formal literacy activities relating to the garden), and observations of students interacting with one another, teachers and community volunteers in the garden (including watering and tending to plants planted by students). Some of the interviews with teachers occurred immediately after the observed lessons. Interviewees included the former principal who helped establish the garden (– an acting-principal was in place during the first year of the data collection, with a permanent appointment made in the second year of the project –) a deputy-principal, a 'Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher', the English as a Second Language specialist, teachers who had made use of the garden in the formal curriculum, the Cultural Development Officer, Community Development Officer, community volunteers and system personnel associated with the establishment of the garden. Interviews were conducted over a period

of 18 months, undertaken mostly at the school site. Interviews were between 20 minutes

(particularly focus group interviews with students) and one hour, although some

interviewees (such as the former principal and one of the system personnel) spoke for

more than an hour about the work of the Community Partnerships initiative, and the role

of the garden. All field work was conducted five years after the Community Partnerships

model was first implemented in the school. That is, interviews and observations were

undertaken once the program had been fully established in the school. (The project was

due for a formal review at the end of the sixth year of the initiative). The observations

were interspersed amongst the individual and focus group interviews. In this way, an

iterative approach to knowledge development was undertaken, involving the validation of

respondents' interview responses through observations, and the use of observations to

stimulate more specific questions with subsequent interviewees. Similarly, analyses of

documents were undertaken throughout the interview and observation phases, as well as

at the beginning and conclusion of the research process, to cross-check and build a more

thorough-going account of the actions, discussions and interactions of the teachers, other

school and community members. While one of the two principal researchers involved in

this project focused his attention upon the development of the garden, and its role in the

establishment and development of the school-community garden, insights gleaned during

the research process were cross-checked against research into other key practices within

the school (specifically, a literacy initiative involving members of the local community

working with refugee students' parents/families who struggled to understand English).

Key themes were distilled using an emergent thematic approach involving searching for patterns within the data, and identifying the most significant recurring themes (Shank 2002). These themes provided insights into the conditions which contributed to the establishment and consolidation of the garden. Specifically, themes related to the action of establishing the garden; the nature of improved school-community connections/relations over time, and; how support for and discussions about the garden assisted and reflected the incorporation of the garden into teachers' formal and informal curricula planning. These themes were then analysed in light of Kemmis and Grootenboer's (2008) concept of practice architectures, to highlight the particular actions, language and relationships which contributed to more productive material-economic, cultural-discursive and socio-political conditions which came to characterise the use of the garden in the school's curriculum.

Findings

This section draws upon interview data collected during the research process to reveal how teachers and other school and community members worked together to forge substantive and relevant learning experiences for students through establishing and sustaining the school-community garden. Teachers and other school personnel's comments reflected insights into the actions, discussions and relationships – 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings' – associated with establishing the garden, the school-community connections which came to be forged over time, and the academic and non-academic curricula experiences enabled by incorporating the garden into teachers' planning. This

section provides an overview of key themes, and presents selected comments indicative of participants' responses more broadly.

The action of establishing the garden

As a school serving a community with multiple, complex needs, there was a strong push to explore different ways in which to engage students in learning, and to recognise students' abilities and capacities. As part of this process, and as evident in other refugee contexts (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012) targeted system support on the part of school administrators enabled relationships to develop with key personnel. This was evident in how the deputy principal reflected upon the role of the Cultural Development Officer, which led to the 'doing' of the garden:

> There's been a whole range of different ways to try and engage the kids – and I guess we talk a lot about 'strengths- based practice' here as well. Trying to focus on what the kids are good at and engaging that way

> …That's where it's great to have Cameron[2], because he looks for those ways to engage the kids … have a look out the back behind these classrooms; that whole space is almost market garden! …. And the kids are out there morning tea and lunchtime with their hose and weeding and watering ...   it's ... to engage the kids. (Mitchell, Deputy Principal)

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[2] Pseudonym for Cultural Development Officer. All names are pseudonyms.

The value of the relationships – 'relatings' – forged with key adults such as the Cultural Development Officer, was reflected in the subsequent actions – 'doings' – and discussions – 'sayings' – to be had with those students who struggled socially at school to better understand their actions and behaviours:

> Back then, we kicked off a community garden out the back. …So the kids that I was working with then, we were from – just it being a bit of a paddock out there to initial soil testing, to just practical stuff … I know, one of the boys I was working with mostly then had a reactive attachment disorder, and he found it difficult to understand the changes – the social changes and life changes, and things like that – and so, it was a good seeing that life and death metaphor in growing things and sharing things. And letting go of control of things. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

This 'growing' and 'sharing' were integral to the success of the initiative for these students.

The 'doing' of establishing the garden as a vehicle for encouraging sustainability, student engagement and foodstuffs for the local community – multiple forms of praxis – was initiated via the building of relationships and talk between several members of the wider community, members of the school community, various government departments, and community service organisations. As in other refugee settings (cf. Naidoo, 2012), expertise provided by a local university also contributed to the success of the initiative:

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The connection is – well when we first started this garden, Michael Smith[3] said, 'Come along to some nutrition – community nutrition and gardening networks'. [These were] meetings that we were having with, I think five different [bodies] – with Access Services; Multi-link, Queensland Health, us, St Vinnie's[4]. Each person contributed their own role, and that was it. And so, there was no funding needed. And then there was a group of Burundi people that were coming. They wanted to learn some cooking things, so everybody won. And well, Michael was involved with some of that and sent some nutrition students along, and from that he was setting up the garden at Greenbank University[5] at that time. And we sort of made some sort of connection back then. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

As the garden became established, it was actively supported by several teachers within the school:

I think people like Cassandra, the Year 5/6 teacher this year, has really wholeheartedly taken on some of those ideas without any concern of, or questioning...

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[3] Pseudonym for a university lecturer contacted by the Cultural Development Officer to learn more about community gardens.
[4] A range of public and not-for-profit organizations providing services to people in the community. All except Queensland Health (the state health department) focus predominantly upon the needs of the poorest and most disenfranchised members of the community.
[5] Pseudonym for university.

People like Tony, as well who is a [Year] 3/4 [teacher], I think this year … In

relation to the garden, he's taken a lot of that sort of activity on as well – some of

that thinking and involvement. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

Through ongoing talk, relationship building and the subsequent action of supporting the

initiative by teachers, school administrators and other school personnel, the garden

became a going concern within the school.

Enhancing school-community relationships

The 'doing' of the garden was due in large measure to the involvement of members of the

wider community who contributed to its development, working in conjunction with

teachers from the school, and as school personnel/officers themselves. A key link

between the community and the school was provided by a member of the Sudanese

community who had been helping to establish a community garden at the neighbouring

university campus, and who was originally employed as a Bilingual School Officer, and

then as a regular School Officer through funding provided through Community

Partnerships programme. Through ongoing talk about her role (including her minor

celebrity status from having appeared on television) and relationship building with

teachers and other personnel within the school, this School Officer brought a wide array

of experiences, including her involvement as the primary gardener at the university:

... Hyacinth Mieta. So, last year she started as a Bilingual School Officer, and then we lost those hours, but she was appointed as a regular School Officer. So, she also, is doing all the work now in the garden; she's a fantastic gardener. She was on – what's that SBS show[6] – 'Costa's Garden' ……Yeah she was on that because she runs the garden at Greenbank University – yeah, the community garden ... She doesn't have kids here, no, no but she works – she's worked here for a little while as a School Officer and as an interpreter, and we knew that she had that connection with the garden and a background in agriculture and things like that as well. (Lisetta, Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher, and Curriculum Support Teacher)

The School Officer's actions of working in the garden, and the contribution of other members of the community, were explicitly valued and supported by the teachers who incorporated the garden into the curriculum, including through much explicit talk about the role and value of the garden:

So when we would go to the garden, we would meet up with the gardener, Hyacinth her name was, and she would explain the area. So today we could be working on a garden bed, or we're going to be doing whatever, and she would explain it with me, [such as] the need to weed it. And the children would ask questions like 'What for; why can't you just plant'? So then she would explain how the vegetables won't grow properly if it's not weeded ... there were

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[6] 'SBS' – Special Broadcasting Service – a national, free-to-air/public television network with a charter to promote multiculturalism in Australia. 'Costa's Garden' is a popular gardening program on the network..

connections there with sustainability because then they were all growing

vegetables. The main part of the garden is the vegetable growing, and then they

knew that the vegetable scraps would be going to the chickens, and also at the

same time, a lady came in and spoke to us about worm farms and donated a worm

farm to the school. So vegetable scraps that were collected were going into the

worm farm as well. So in the garden I suppose they saw all of that working, and

they saw people from the community coming in and using the garden,

maintaining it, taking the vegetables away. … And we talked, we did talk about

how, what if there was a flood[7], and all of the supermarkets close and everything

closed, what would you do for food. So we talked about that a lot … It was great.

(Cassandra, Year 6/7 teacher)

Through engagement with the School Officer and other community members, and by

working in the garden and with the worm farm, the garden became a site of changed

practice – praxis – for these students, and their teachers.

Such praxis was supported through relationship building to foster ongoing activity in the

garden. This was evident in the positive way in which the School Officer was described

by the Cultural Development Officer, and in how she was described as approaching

teachers establishing further relationships with teachers and students:

Hyacinth's been great in the school really, in terms of giving her an opportunity to

work somewhere in a lot of her strengths. And she's completely autonomously

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[7] The reference to flooding relates to the devastating flooding throughout Queensland in early 2011.

approached teachers and set up learning activities with kids. (Cameron, Cultural

Development Officer).

And students recognised the positive relations, collaboration and work between the

School Officer and the Cultural Development Officer:

Simon: There's a teacher called Miss Hyacinth, she plants most of the plants-

Lynette: Yeah, she helps as well- … Mr [Cameron] Jones. (Year 6/7 students)

A key part of the success of the garden was the relationship forged between school

personnel and another key individual, 'Dennis', who was interested in assisting members

of his own Burmese community:

Dennis sort of just walked into the school off the street and wanted some help to

do some vegetable food gardening. You know, he wanted to learn a bit about that

for his community. And it turned out he's published a couple of books and been

working for twelve years on sustainable agriculture in the refugee camps on the

Thai-Burma border and all that sort of stuff, and has incredible knowledge and

experience! (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

Dennis's horticultural knowledge and his own experiences as a refugee were recognised

and his relationship valued by teachers within the school, who recognised how his

contribution benefited student learning:

This year we had an influx of Burmese refugee children, so we have a volunteer Burmese man, Dennis ... he's an expert in subsistence gardening. Because all the kids came from the same refugee camp in Thailand and they live a very – they just form their own villages, and they live totally off the land in a little space. And Dennis's written a book; he's an expert on that. So, he comes in as a volunteer on Mondays.

…So, the Burmese children really love the garden because its – they relate to it because they know how to gather food. If you sent them out into the bush, honestly, they could survive… Yeah they're really great. (Lisetta, Literacy and Numeracy Improvement Teacher, and Curriculum Support Teacher)

These 'doings' were further assisted by the Cultural Development Officer's efforts to foster relationships and knowledge-sharing between Dennis and other environmentalists with an interest in sustainable agriculture, such as those engaged in an inner-city farm:

We've also connected him up with people in 'City Street' City Farm as well, so he's setting up little demonstration things up there for sustainable energy and all of that. So, I mean I like that connection through him from them. You know – that there's people with a lot of knowledge up there and the kinds of things that they're doing – he's now there and kind of embedded up there – they're really

interested in him – and he volunteers here as well. So we sort of have connections to that pool of knowledge. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

Such formalised training opportunities, 'sayings', were also recognised as important for augmenting the knowledge of those involved with the garden, and contributing directly to the 'doing' of a unit on sustainability as part of the formal curriculum:

So they'd be currently Grade 6 and 7, last year they were 5 and 6. It was a 5, 6 composite class. Where they did an audit of how much organic waste our school uses, how much that would increase into landfill, so it is about that connectedness, you know, of seeing the bigger picture. And then from there we also had our fruit tree planting... So they were learning from both Dennis and also through the permaculture training how our organic waste is used by trees to grow more food. So using food to grow food and compost... (Andrew, Community Development Officer)

Such was the impact of units of work related to the garden that students' learning influenced the broader community, often their parents, and continued beyond the specific formal academic curriculum:

The Year 5/6 class looked at – they did an organic waste audit and we started to process all of our organic waste on site now. … I hear lots of stories now; the

kids are hassling their parents, and growing something at home. (Cameron,

Cultural Development Officer).

While not always going to plan, there was evidence of this flow-on effects of students'

involvement in the garden from students themselves:

Yeah, I told my mum to make a garden but she said it'd take too much space!

(Justin, Year 6 student)

Even when changed practice – praxis – was not evident to the extent originally intended,

there was evidence of changed practice, and attempts to change practice in positive and

productive ways. Such comments reflect how teachers' work and engagement/relating

with members of the community led to further discussion and activity which was

influencing students' attitudes, even if it was sometimes difficult to effect change beyond

schooling settings more broadly.

'Talking up' the garden: Cultivating the formal and informal curriculum

The garden informed the formal curriculum of the school. This was evident in the

actions/doings taken by teachers to enact the mathematics curriculum:

And then we got given some fruit trees, so my maths class planted the fruit trees.

So we did a lot of measuring, and they planned where they were going to go, and

then they planted them. And then my home-class fertilised them every day with the fruit and veg scraps and the bread and the ham ... So all of that amazing learning (Cassandra, Year 6/7 teacher).

Evidence of relationship building and subsequent action, and discussion were evident in teachers' emphasis upon sustainability through the garden, and the fieldwork they supported to inform both the academic and non-academic curriculum within the school:

> When they were out at Cameron's farm, they saw an example of sustainability in action when they saw the worm farm feeding fertiliser to the fish farm, and then the fish being eaten by Cameron, and the fish … fed some strawberries, and hydroponic strawberries that were there and then Cameron would have fruit and veg. scraps that he would then give to the chickens. So they saw this cycle of how things can be recycled and re-used and how that's a lot more sustainable. We did talk a lot about how that would be a lot more sustainable than what we do, which is just go to the shopping centre. So then, later on, when we were in the garden, the kids were making connections, you know, saying "We can feed this to the chickens and then they won't be thrown out." ... And so they made that connection that well we could really reduce our rubbish and be more sustainable if we just put it all on the garden, put all our scraps on the garden, and they came up with as well, a drive, a school-wide drive to use less packaging with our food so that we were just collecting fruit and veg scraps instead of rubbish, plastic and paper rubbish. (Cassandra, Year 6/7 teacher).

As well as effecting changed practices – praxis – within the school, the positive relations/relating between teachers and the Cultural Development Officer resulted in the 'doing' of linking of the garden to a unit of work on rainforests:

> [Students] were looking at rainforests. This is a three year – 5, 6, 7 teacher ... we co-planned and turned that into a sustainability focus looking at rain forests as natural systems – this was coming from permaculture thinking, ...[from] rainforests as natural systems through to looking at industrial agriculture, through to looking at, I guess in a way permaculture but local food, and how we can be informed by natural systems. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

The Cultural Development Officer was seen as vital for encouraging teachers to take responsibility for working with him to make connections between the formal curriculum and the garden:

> And how that works is Cameron … he'll send out emails. Or he'll catch up with teachers. And it's off the teacher's own back to say, 'Hey, I'm interested in doing something with you'. So his timetable becomes quite full. And he's continued to work with Cassandra since she's been in the classroom. She was teaching in Year 5 last year, and now she's in 6-7 and she enjoys the work that he's done with her kids, so she always accesses him. (Sylvia, ESL teacher)

Positive relations/relating on the part of teachers were evident in descriptions of the in-depth discussions which occurred with the Cultural Development Officer. Such discussions were themselves important learning activities for teachers which assisted in the development of more substantive, albeit complex, learning experiences for students:

> So, you know, for example, [with] two of the Year 6 and 7 teachers for next year, we've planned some work with the Indigenous focus – well they wanted to do Indigenous history, I guess sort of testing out some of the new National Curriculum [particularly the] history focus. ... So we sort of have a bit of planning time together last week or something, where I sort of suggested that maybe we should look at something over a year with a focus on general Indigenous history to start with, but then look at how we can know and become part of local Indigenous communities. … Cassandra, the teacher, is looking at potentially blowing out this whole thing to something really complicated where we might be out doing things in places out of the school and getting people to come into the school and things like that as well. But she's happy to do that over the year. (Cameron, Cultural Development Officer)

The relationships built by teachers and school personnel with community volunteers were reflected in the way volunteers took an active interest in students' education – a form of praxis – including recognising the value of the garden for informing students' learning beyond the regular/formal curriculum:

Yeah the curriculum is okay, for example … okay we show them here [points to classroom], but the best way is we let them go to the garden to measure the plant... This is one square metre. How many we will plant? ... How many? … We can plant in this area, and something like that – so they learn some mathematics, by measuring and this. It's more ... 'real world' ... Also, it's a lot of history, … history also, about … the culture … In the garden you can learn a lot. (Dennis, Community Volunteer)

These positive 'relatings' and the 'doings' of establishing the garden, and the language of learning, the 'sayings' on the part of teachers and school personnel, were reflected in students valuing of these 'real world' activities:

Lexie: Yes, love to work in the garden.

Michelle: It helps you to grow plants.

Ned: It's fun because you're doing something.

Charlotte: Lots of fun.

Lexie: When you grow up we can make our own garden at our own house.

Charlotte: You should … your garden because it gives you – it's good for energy, like exercise. (Year 3 students)

Through multiple relationships forged between teachers, other school personnel and the community, and ongoing talk about how to develop the garden as a site for learning between these people, the garden became a site of considerable discussion and activity as

a 'living laboratory' which provided engaged educational experiences for students. Students' desire to establish a garden as part of their future lives, beyond schooling, also reflects how such 'doings,' 'sayings' and 'relatings' helped forge a genuinely praxis-oriented approach which has the potential for not only changing individual (students') lives, but that of humanity as a collective more generally (through more sustainable practices).

Discussion: Cultivating the conditions for engaged student learning

The way in which the garden was supported and established by teachers and school personnel within the school provides evidence of the valuing of a set of specific 'goods' (MacIntyre 1983), most obviously associated with education for sustainability, and the active valuing of cultural difference within the broader community. The garden served as a site for a form of *educational praxis* which involved teachers and other school personnel acknowledging and valuing the differences and experiences which students and their communities brought to everyday school settings. This process both enabled and was enabled by a wider valuing and recognition of the contributions, knowledges and talents of members in the broader community. Rather than focusing upon what this community or its students lacked, for teachers and other school personnel at this school, the garden served as a vehicle for promoting the strengths and capacities within the community, including its cultural diversity. At the same time as promoting more sustainable environmental and agricultural practices and providing foodstuffs for the community, the garden encouraged respect for the integrity of each person, recognising

that each person has particular capacities and abilities which help enrich their own lives and that of others, and the need to acknowledge that each person can contribute positively to the local and broader communities within which they live. Rather than being assessed as 'lacking' (Ladson-Billings, 1995), as often characterises understandings of refugees and immigrant others (Ong, 2003), efforts on the part of teachers and associated schooling personnel to engage students on the basis of their strengths reflect positive practices found to be successful in schooling settings with refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). The action/'doing' of teachers working in conjunction with community members to embed engaging experiences within the regular school curriculum serves as evidence of practice as praxis (Kemmis and Smith 2008), and of a capacity to take into account the need to make explicit connections between students' existing knowledge and understandings, the broader community, and the knowledge and understanding more typically associated with the academic school curriculum, and non-academic outcomes (Ladwig 2010).

However, these individual practices as praxis do not arise in isolation. While they are the product of actions and decisions on the part of individuals and groups, they are also influenced by the particular conditions within which they arise, and which help contribute to the nature of the decisions which are made. The way in which several members of staff engaged in discussions – 'sayings' – fostered strong relationships – 'relatings' – and emphasised and valued the experiences, actions – the 'doings' – of other staff, community members and students, all reveal a respect and recognition for the particular attributes which these people contributed to the school community. These doings,

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sayings and relatings, helped to create changed conditions for practice. Recognising these changed practices, and changed conditions for practice, has the potential to encourage educators to go beyond deficit-based critiques of schooling, and give credence instead to the capacities, attributes and knowledges which local communities do possess (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Such productive relations were evident in how the Cultural Development Officer, for example, foregrounded the knowledge and capacities which resided within the community, and the way in which these were construed as valuable assets to enhance the schooling experiences of students. This is very much part of the genuinely inclusive approach advocated by Taylor and Sidhu (2012) as a key schooling practice for active engagement for refugee students. Indeed, the very act of providing funding through the Community Partnerships programme, which enabled the employment of the Cultural Development Officer in the school, is itself evidence of a particular action – 'doing' – reflective of a material-economic investment which enabled activities within the school which would not otherwise have been possible. As in Pugh *et al*.'s (2012) research, such structural support in the form of Community Liason Officers (of which the Cultural Development Officer was a variation) was part of the reason for the success of the Community Partnerships initiative.

The garden was integral to promoting students' sense of well-being, for building confidence and engagement. However, the garden was made possible by teachers working with several members of the wider community, and personnel not typically associated with schools. The relationship established by staff at the school, such as the Cultural Development Officer, members of the community and university staff with

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expertise in nutrition, and ongoing talk and discussions between these people, enabled the garden to become successfully established. Through discussions with community and school members, the knowledge provided by an academic from a neighbouring university was part of the catalyst for the establishment of the garden. Again, co-ordination of specific resources provided through a university (cf. Naidoo, 2012) by teachers and other school personnel, such as community liaison officers (cf. Pugh *et al*., 2012), contributed to the success of the initiative. The establishment of the garden was also part of a broader process of relationship building with multiple government and non-government not-for-profit services to help foster improved integration of newly arrived immigrants, many of whom were refugees, into the local community. The discussions which were had as part of the community nutrition and gardening networks were integral to spreading knowledge and understanding to help these new members of the community to become productive members of society, and to help establish the school garden. The material-economic resourcing of these services (including voluntary participation of members) contributed to providing the conditions conducive to community members' improved integration into the society, and engagement with the school.

Multiple discussions, 'sayings', were also important for introducing members of the community to one another, including members of the school community to the university who had experience of refugees and community garden development. These discussions were enabled through the relationships developed between school personnel such as the Cultural Development Officer and university personnel. These sayings and relatings, in turn, led to the involvement of a key participant in the university community garden, the

School Officer – herself a former refugee from Sudan via Uganda. The 'doing' of the provision of funding through the Community Partnerships programme also enabled the part-time employment of this School Officer, which further reinforced the connection between the Sudanese community in the local area, and the school. Again, this material-economic resourcing (cf. Pugh *et al*., 2012) fostered the cultivation of more substantive relationships between members of the community as they engaged in the garden as a community garden, but also improved the interconnections between the school and members of the wider community, including, but not limited to parents whose children attended the school. Having the capacity to employ the School Officer enabled her, in turn, to engage in discussions with the students which then enabled them to better understand principles of gardening, permaculture, and agriculture more generally. In these ways, pedagogies of difference rather than indifference (Lingard, 2007) came to characterise schooling relations. This was also evident in how teachers engaged with the work and teaching of the School Officer as part of their own teaching. As with Hattam and Zipin's (2009) account of redesigning teaching practices in South Australia, these collaborations were enhanced by interactions between personnel from universities, school and the local community.

These members of the school staff and community members were valued for the contributions they could make to the school, and the 'funds of knowledge' they brought with them (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005). These funds of knowledge included the gardening experiences of the School Officer – both those she already possessed prior to coming to Australia, and those developed since her arrival. The way in which the School

Officer independently approached and spoke with teachers to contribute ideas provides

evidence of the sorts of language, sayings, which contributed towards the valuing of the

garden. Importantly, teachers were recognised for being willing to incorporate ideas –

doings – associated with the garden into the curriculum. Teachers were not reticent to be

involved, but were instead willing and able to incorporate material and experiences

relating to the garden into their regular curriculum. These discussions and actions were

not possible without the relationship building and dialogue which attended the

development of the garden *per se*, and were reflective of both a genuinely inclusive

approach and support for students' learning needs which characterise successful

schooling practices for refugee students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012).

Similarly, productive conditions were cultivated through how teachers and school

personnel valued students' existing knowledge and understanding in relation to food

production and gathering. Teachers reflected upon how some of the students, such as the

Burmese students recently arrived from refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border,

possessed knowledge about hunting, gathering and sustainable gardening which enabled

them to survive under adverse circumstances and conditions. This explicit valuing of

students' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005) in the form of the

knowledge and understanding they bring from home to school, rather than what they

lack, is integral to promoting student success. By providing the opportunity to display

students' funds of knowledge, the garden enabled these students to more fully display

their understanding in ways which would not have been possible otherwise. The

relationship between the Burmese member of the community who came to work in the

garden ('Dennis') and these students was also important, given their common experiences, and enabled substantive discussions, conversations, between students, community members and teachers. In these ways, school-community connections were fostered which promoted student engagement and understanding, and, as in other settings, led to benefits for both students and the wider community (Thomson 2006).

The provision of resources to enable key members of staff with a particular interest in the garden to undertake formal horticultural training is a further example of how material-economic resourcing enabled more substantive curriculum development and broader student learning – an example of the sorts of necessary structural support to ensure success for refugee students (Pugh *et al*., 2012). These experiences were enabled by particular relationships, including knowledge of the courses which were offered through a specialised urban permaculture farm in another part of the city. By being involved in these activities, these personnel were empowered to work more closely with teachers (and their students) in planning units of work on permaculture, sustainability and agriculture which were well supported by access to the garden. The effects of this work as a form of praxis beyond 'school' or 'academic' knowledge were evident in stories of students encouraging ('hassling') their parents to establish their own gardens at home, and to engage in recycling and more sustainable practices. These outcomes were fostered by material support, discussions and interactions and served as structuring practices – practice architectures (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008) – which helped to facilitate curriculum development practices which enabled learning to occur in ways which may not have been possible without such support.

The 'doing' of integrating the garden into the more formal curriculum was also encouraged through other actions, language and relationships amongst teachers and school personnel at the school. Planting the fruit trees made it possible to develop more real-world and life-like applications of mathematical and scientific concepts which might otherwise have been somewhat ethereal for students. Also, by connecting with students' understandings of agriculture in their home-countries, these teaching practices served as 'pedagogies of difference' (Lingard 2007). This desire and capacity of teachers and school personnel to integrate students' wider real-world and community experiences and associations with the academic school curriculum is also evidence of recognition on the part of educators of their responsibility and capacity to ensure the curriculum is engaging for students, and indeed that it should ultimately be an experience which students enjoy. Occurring alongside discussions about how to map out the beds for the planting of the trees, these pedagogies were also built upon the myriad relationships which enabled the garden to be present within the school in the first place.

Similarly, when teachers provided the opportunity for students to visit a small farm established by the Cultural Development Officer on his own land, and to see how he had applied permaculture principles on a larger scale, students were able to better appreciate the concept of sustainability, and how it could relate to their own lives and experiences at a more local level – again, a form of praxis. Witnessing the production of food and recycling on the Cultural Development Officer's farm enabled students to better appreciate sustainability in action – an example of a pedagogical 'doing'. Again,

students' learning was dependent upon the multiple relationships/relatings forged over time between teachers and the Cultural Development Officer, the ongoing discussions/sayings which characterised these relationships, and a series of gardening actions/'doings' which students had already undertaken, and which helped them make sense of their experiences during the visit to the farm.

Conclusion

The research presented reveals not only the value of developing and using a school-based community garden as a tool for curriculum development and engagement by those within schools, but details about how this was initiated and enacted. By trying to make explicit the practice architectures – the particular 'doings', 'sayings' and 'relatings' – which contributed to the development and enactment of the garden, the research adds to existing literature on school-community partnerships, particularly in relation to low SES and refugee communities, particularly by more explicitly theorising the details of this development and enactment process. Conceptually, the research provides insights into how teachers and other schooling personnel working with refugee students can engage in alternative and productive ways of enacting the formal, academic curriculum whilst simultaneously valuing and validating those authentic, quality teaching and learning experiences associated with the communities of which they are a part. These more praxis-oriented approaches, including teachers' understandings of 'non-academic' outcomes, constitute some of the most valuable and valid learning which teachers experience. Finding ways to cultivate conditions for such learning to occur on the part of

teachers and school-based educators should be policy-makers and practitioners' foremost priority.

By foregrounding how this learning played out in a school setting serving low SES and refugee students, the research also serves as a resource of hope for teachers, policymakers, researchers and other educators seeking to find ways to engage students living and learning under the most challenging material circumstances. While it is important not to gloss over or to downplay the complexities which characterise a school located in one of the poorest communities in Australia (or any other developed country more generally), the emphasis upon the garden and teachers work and learning with community members serves as a means of acknowledging and valuing the actions – 'doings' – interactions – 'relatings' – and dialogue – 'sayings' – which can be forged between schools and communities. This knowledge was recognised and built upon in ways which not only informed individual members of the school and wider community, but actively enriched the formal and informal curriculum for students, and the communities in which they lived. The research reveals how teachers and those in schools can foster rich curricula opportunities, and how this can be achieved through cultivating actions, relationships and dialogue with the communities of which they are a part.

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