

Fact sheet – Youth in the AMEP

These fact sheets have been developed by the AMEP Research Centre to provide AMEP teachers with information on areas of professional concern. They provide a summary as well as identifying some annotated references that can be used to broaden knowledge and extend understanding. These references can be obtained through the AMEP Resource Centre at rescentr@nceltr.mq.edu.au

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Background

Youth (18–24 year olds) are a growing presence in AMEP courses. The proportion of youth participants in programs has increased by 14.5% over the past five years. In 2004, almost 20% of all AMEP participants were within this age range. Statistics from DIMA tell us that this group is neither homogeneous in nationality nor in educational background. Large numbers of young people have migrated recently from South-East/East Asia (Vietnam, China, Cambodia), the Middle East (Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey), Africa (Sudan, Ethiopia), and Eastern Europe (Yugoslavia, Croatia). While a majority of youth participants have had 11 to 12 years of previous education, a sizeable proportion (around 13%) has only had between one and seven years of prior schooling. Most young people arrive on family visas (around 75%), although a significant number hold humanitarian/refugee visas (around 25%). A large majority of youth students are women (68% in 2004).

Issues

Research has identified that this cohort of migrant and refugee youth have settlement and educational issues unique from those of older migrants (for example, see Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986; Harding and Wigglesworth 2005).

Settlement

Despite the cohort's diversity in cultural background and level of prior education, migrant and refugee youth have many difficulties in common with each other in achieving successful settlement in Australia. A policy on youth produced by the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) has identified a number of issues that specifically affect young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CLDB):

- There may be a wider 'generation gap' between CLDB youth and their parents, as young people

may experience a more 'rapid acculturation process' than their parents.

- Young migrants may find it difficult to negotiate differences between the cultural expectations of their family, and the cultural expectations of the wider community.
- Young migrants may be required to perform adult roles if their English skills are more advanced than their parents'.
- Young migrants' parents may not understand or be supportive of their children accessing youth services.
- Seeking outside help may lead to feelings of disloyalty to family.
- Young migrants may lack knowledge about available pathways for education and employment.
- Young refugees may have suffered from trauma or torture, or be affected by family or friends who have suffered.
- Mainstream youth services may not be aware of cultural issues affecting young migrants.
- Young people from CLDB are often portrayed negatively in the media.

(FECCA 2005)

The FECCA policy points not only to difficulties in access to services for youth, but also to underlying issues of identity. In a study of Somali migrant youth in Finland, Alitolppa-Niitamo (2002: 285) suggests that, in addition to the normal challenges of late adolescence, 'adolescents with an immigrant background also need to engage in a process of reconstructing their ethnic identity'. Watts and White (2002: 4), in a New Zealand study, found that young migrants and refugees are often 'caught in conflicts between peer group pressures and parental expectations'. Balancing divergent expectations from community and family is certain to create great challenges for newly arrived young migrants.

Alitolppa-Niitamo and Watts and White characterise migrant youth broadly as 'the generation in-between' and 'the 1.5 generation' respectively. However, research suggests that individuals respond to differences between the norms of the host community and their ethnic community in numerous ways. In a survey of literature on ethnic adolescent health, Bryan and Batch (2002: 27) suggest that, 'individuals who migrate do not encounter identical experiences, nor do all individuals experience the same levels of distress and disarrangement'. Rather, a complex range of factors is involved, such as 'socioeconomic and political status, and the responses of the host community' (p 27). Recent studies in an Australian context conducted by Leung (2001) and Sondregger and Barrett (2004) have found that patterns of adjustment among young migrants vary depending on gender, age and cultural background. Leung surveyed research which suggests that young migrant women experience more conflict with their parents than young men, and that older migrant youth experience more problems than those who are younger. Sondregger and Barrett found that former-Yugoslavian youth were able to embrace both their ethnic identity and Australian culture more easily than youth with a Chinese background, citing similarities between the cultural practices of Australia and former-Yugoslavia as a key factor.

Nevertheless, although there may not be universal responses, migration has been linked to feelings of anxiety and low self-esteem (Sondregger and Barrett 2004). For youth, migration often means separation from friends and an extended family, having to live with distressed adults, and possible peer rejection within the host community (see Winter and Young 1998). Social connectedness is a prime settlement need of young migrants. Yet forming social networks can be the most difficult factor in settlement for youth, due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Watts and White 2002). This is especially so for youth in adult migrant English programs, who often do not experience the same opportunities for interaction with peers as their counterparts in high schools or higher education.

Education

Migrant youth in the AMEP generally cite 'learning English' as their most pressing need (see Harding and Wigglesworth 2005). English provides tools with which to form social networks in the wider community, and it also enables greater access to a range of services. For youth, specifically, success in learning English opens up pathways to future study and vocational training. Harding and Wigglesworth (2005) found that youth in AMEP programs had a wide range of ambitions, ranging from vocational training as a mechanic or hairdresser to completing a university degree. However, delivering language

programs to migrant youth can prove difficult because of the diverse previous educational levels of many young migrants. Some young learners have completed high school, while others may have only basic literacy in their first language. In 1986, a report on youth in migrant English programs saw 'gaps' in specific policy for young learners with disrupted schooling (Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986). A recent report by the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) still identifies policy on this issue as a problem (CMYI 2004).

Within classes where youth and older adults are mixed, learner beliefs about age and language acquisition can cause potential motivation problems. According to Dörnyei (2001: 29), achieving a 'cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms' is an essential component of 'basic motivational conditions' in the language learning classroom. However, some young learners perceive older students as being slower language learners who only study English because they have been made to (see Harding and Wigglesworth 2005). These perceptions of divergent abilities and motivations between generations have the potential to frustrate young students who are anxious to learn. They also may affect the establishment of a cohesive learner group, and the group's willingness to cooperate.

Classroom implications

Approaches to teaching youth will depend on the generational make-up of a given class. Clearly, classes entirely consisting of youth will have the benefit of curriculums and social programs that can be designed to cater specifically for this group. However, this is far from simple, because even the youth cohort is not homogeneous. Ideally, young people should be streamed depending on their previous educational levels, so that teachers can deal more effectively with their particular language learning needs. For example, Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE in Victoria runs two different youth programs: the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) for youth who have not finished secondary school, or who have had disrupted schooling; and the Academic English Program for Young Adults (AEPYA) for those who have completed 11 years of education (see <http://www.nmit.vic.edu.au/courses/youth/default.html> for more information).

Teachers of classes where youth are mixed with older students may not have the opportunity to design different curriculums for different sets of young people. However, a number of classroom strategies that have been observed to be successful in youth-only classes (see Harding and Wigglesworth 2005) can be adapted to address the specific needs of this group.

Atmosphere

Young migrant learners typically enjoy less formal classrooms, though with clearly defined boundaries (such as strict rules about lateness). They enjoy games, quizzes and physical activities or the opportunity to move about the room. Youth learners also appreciate being granted a good degree of input into what they are learning. Where young learners are in classes with older adults, it will be necessary to strike a balance.

Content

Classes should also be within the scope of young students' experiences. For example, asking young students to role-play going to the bank to ask for a loan may lack meaning for them, and will therefore not be successful as a language learning task. Some topics that are relevant and appropriate for young people might be:

- writing a résumé and job application letter;
- interviewing for a part-time job;
- opening a bank account;

- enquiring about a course at university or TAFE;
- functional language for the workplace (from the perspective of, say, an apprentice);
- understanding the road rules;
- computer skills (such as writing emails).

Apart from addressing language needs, young migrants also need education about future pathways to study or work. This information needs to be easily comprehensible and realistic. For these reasons, some AMEP providers of youth-specific language programs have set up direct pathways to TAFE providers.

Social activities

Ideally, youth should be enrolled in classes that are full-time, as this adds to the sense of social connectedness that newly arrived young migrants need. However, this is not always possible as Special Preparatory Program (SPP) courses, in which they often enrol initially, are held three days a week. Nevertheless, the more contact that young students have with other young students, the better. Excursions

Table 1: Information for and about young migrants and refugees

Name	Website	Description
Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues	www.cmyi.net.au	A very useful website for teachers and students. For educators, it provides downloadable research reports on multicultural youth issues. For students, it provides information on health, legal, transport and accommodation matters.
Western Young People's Independent Network	http://home.vicnet.net.au/~wypin/	A comprehensive website designed for young migrants and refugees living in Melbourne's west. This site contains an overview of issues affecting migrant youth, as well as information about anti-racism initiatives, community projects, etc.
DIMA Youth Information	http://www.immi.gov.au/settle/youth/youthgen.htm	This government website provides information on living, health, study, work and recreation by State and Territory. However, many of the youth links are not specific to migrant/refugee youth.
Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia	http://www.fecca.org.au/Committees/Youth.html	FECCA established a Youth Steering Committee in 2004 that has produced a draft youth policy (which is currently in third draft). Submissions to, and recommendations on, the policy can be made online at this website.
Multicultural Youth South Australia	http://mysa.com.au/index.html	According to its website, MYSA is currently undergoing a restructuring. In the future it will provide links to publications and ongoing projects.
Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies	http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/	Although not exclusively devoted to young migrant issues, the ACYS provides links to a number of articles concerning ethnic youth at http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ysa/index/multicul.htm

and outdoor activities should be included as much as possible. Interacting with classmates outside the classroom is particularly important for newly arrived young learners as a way to establish friendships (see Maiolo and Johnson 2003). In addition, teachers could incorporate group-work activities that learners can complete outside the class, to encourage students to gather with peers in their own time. If computer resources are available, students could be encouraged to participate in online discussion with classmates, or with peers at other educational institutions. Teachers and program directors may also liaise with local organisations that run programs to assist young migrants in establishing and maintaining social networks (see Table 1).

Further information

It is sometimes difficult to find information that is specifically targeted at migrant and refugee youth; as Sherington (1995) has stated, changes in migrant and youth policy had for many years been parallel, but only recently have these policies converged. At present, some organisations exist around Australia that provide information and support services specifically for migrant and refugee youth. Table 1 shows an overview of some of these with links to websites.

Annotated bibliography

Alitolppa-Niitamo, A. (2002). The generation in-between: Somali youth and schooling in metropolitan Helsinki. *Intercultural Education*, 13(3), 275–290.

Alitolppa-Niitamo is a PhD student at the University of Helsinki whose research concerns Somali youth in the Finnish education system. Her characterisation of this group as ‘the generation in-between’ is closely aligned to the term ‘1.5 generation’ proposed by Watts and White (see below).

Biggs, J. B., Kember, D., & Leung, D. Y. P. (2001). ??

Bryan, B., & Batch, J. A. (2002). The complexities of ethnic adolescent health. *Youth studies Australia*, 21(1), 24–33.

This article is a literature review of ethnic minority adolescent health issues in Australia. It is broad in scope, covering mental health, sexual health, risk-taking behaviour and access to health services among other topics. The article is not written for an expert audience, and as such provides an informative and readable introduction to the issues for non-health specialists.

Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues [CMYI] (2004). *Pathways and pitfalls: The journey of refugee young people in and around the education system in greater Dandenong*.

Carlton, Dandenong: Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues and South-East Local Learning and Employment Network.

A link to the CMYI is provided in Table 1 above. This report, which is downloadable from the website, focuses on the gaps and barriers that young migrants (16+) in Dandenong face in continuing their education or finding employment. It also identifies positive practices and makes recommendations.

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). *Motivational strategies in the language classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dörnyei’s book gives theoretical perspectives on motivation, and practical advice for use in the language learning classroom. Dörnyei has subsequently authored and co-authored a number of articles on the subject of motivation, and in 2003 edited a special issue of *Language Learning* on attitudes, orientations and motivation.

Federation of Ethnic Communities’ Councils of Australia [FECCA] (2005). *FECCA youth policy* (third draft). Retrieved 9 October 2005 from: <http://www.fecca.org.au/Policy/index.html>

See Table 1 above.

Harding, L., & Wigglesworth, G. (2005). Different generations, different needs: Migrant youth in English language programs. *Prospect*, 20(3), 6–23

This recent Australian study provides a survey of language programs for migrant youth in the AMEP, and details the views of young migrant learners and their teachers/program directors. The authors propose a number of recommendations for the provision of language education for young people in both youth-specific and mixed-age classes.

Maiolo, T., & Johnson, N. (2003). *Meeting the needs of youth: West Coast AMES*. West Coast AMES: AMEP Special Projects Research Program.

This study was conducted as a needs analysis of young people in West Coast AMES (Perth). Youth learners are reported to be happy with the program, and with a mixture of ages and nationalities in classes.

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE [NMIT] (2004). *New Project for Migrant and Refugee Education*. Retrieved 1 March 2005 from:

http://www.nmit.vic.edu.au/media/media_releases/2004/nmit_media_040104.html

This media release from NMIT in Victoria gives a useful overview of the Good Futures Project, which aims to inform newly arrived young migrants about the educational pathways open to them.

Rado, M., Foster, L., & Bradley, D. (1986). *English language needs of migrant and refugee youth*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Although it is now 20 years old, this major study (which was commissioned by the then Department of Education and Youth Affairs) is a detailed overview of issues that affected, and that still affect, migrant and refugee youth. Rado, Foster and Bradley outline the needs of migrant youth and provide some practical chapters on professional development and materials development in language centres with large youth cohorts. Of particular interest to future researchers, the authors supply all questionnaires and interview questions used for data collection in appendices.

Sherington, G. E. (1995). Youth policy and ethnic youth: A history. In C. Guerra & R. White (Eds.), *Ethnic Minority Youth in Australia* (pp. 25–34). Hobart: National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

Sherington provides a concise and informative history of State and Federal policy initiatives concerning ethnic youth. The chapter appears in an edited collection alongside other papers that discuss, among other topics, the media stereotyping of ethnic youth, the difficulties experienced by young asylum seekers, and the particular issues facing young Muslims in rural areas. Despite being over ten years old, these articles are increasingly relevant.

Sondregger, R., & Barrett, P. M. (2004). Patterns of cultural adjustment among young migrants to Australia. *Journal of child and family studies*, 13(3), 341–356.

These authors have been involved in a number of studies investigating anxiety problems among young migrants and refugees in Australia. Although the paper cited here is a dense, quantitative research report, the introduction provides a very clear and useful overview of previous research on young people's emotional responses to fitting into a new culture.

Watts, N., & White, C. (2002, November). *The 1.5 generation in New Zealand*. Paper presented at the AMEP National Conference, Canberra.

Watts and White attempt to address a gap in research on young people in New Zealand's migrant population. They use the term '1.5 generation' to express how young migrants 'straddle the old and new worlds' (p. 2) in a different way from their parents, or from their second-generation siblings born after arrival.

Winter, K. A., & Young, M. Y. (1998). Biopsychosocial considerations in refugee mental health. In S. Kazarian & D. R. Evans (Eds.), *Cultural clinical psychology* (pp. 348–376). New York: Oxford University Press.

The editors of this volume have put together a collection of chapters addressing the relationship between culture, acculturation and health. Winter and Young examine how a lack of social support affects self-esteem among young migrants.

Compiled by
Luke Harding
The University of Melbourne

