

Different generations, different needs: Migrant youth in English language programs

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ABSTRACT

Migrant youth have different social and educational needs from those of their parents. However, young migrants are often included in 'mixed-age' language programs either because institutions lack the numbers to create youth-specific classes or because such classes are deemed unnecessary. In this article, we investigate the provisions made for migrant youth in the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). Data is collected, first, through a survey of AMEP providers. Then, the opinions of young migrants themselves are ascertained through focus group interviews, which are further supplemented by interviews with teachers and program directors. Finally, based on the information gathered from learners and educators, we outline a number of future directions for addressing the needs of this group.

Introduction

The integration of young adult migrants into Australian society is crucial both to the future of the young people themselves and to Australia as a nation. For those institutions whose role it is to support the settlement and language learning of Australia's migrant population, the settlement of young people presents particular challenges. Young people have different needs from their parents and may have encountered a range of particularly difficult, and sometimes traumatic, situations as children: they may have come from a background of disrupted schooling; they may have lost family members and close friends; and they may have difficult home situations. The success with which young migrants settle in Australia will impact not only on their educational outcomes and the ways they approach work, but also on their more general achievements in life. For these reasons, those institutions that cater to the needs of youth must not only acknowledge the particular needs of this client group, but also investigate the extent to which these needs are being understood and addressed.

The aims of the project reported here were, first, to identify the

availability of programs that have been designed specifically for youth (aged 16 to 24) within the AMEP through a survey of program managers and coordinators of language and literacy programs. Then, through focus-group interviews with young people themselves, we wanted to identify problems and issues that arise for young people in their pursuit of settlement and education in Australia. The project was designed to focus specifically on the AMEP and the role it plays in addressing these needs.

Background

MIGRANT YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

The migrant youth demographic in Australian society has, historically, often been overlooked. Sherington (1995: 29) traces the changes in federal policy on youth and migrant issues, describing progress in both areas as 'paralleled' but 'separate' after the introduction of multicultural policies in the 1970s and 1980s. In recent years, the needs of 'ethnic youth', and with them the needs of newly arrived young migrants, have come into sharper focus. Presently, there are numerous bodies that administer multicultural youth affairs, including the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, the Ethnic Youth Issues Network and the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) among others. A significant amount of research is now conducted into multicultural youth affairs each year in areas such as mental health (see Raphael 2000), with particular attention currently on children and young refugees and asylum-seekers held in detention centres (see HREOC 2004).

This increased attention on migrant youth may be attributable to an increase in the demographic itself. Data from the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) show that, while the total number of AMEP participants nationally has risen by 1.9 per cent over the past five years, the total number of youth (classified as the 18 to 24-year-old age group) in programs has risen by 14.5 per cent (see Table 1).

Table 1: Youth participants in the AMEP, 2000–04¹

Year	Total national participants	Total youth participants
2000	33 515	5455
2001	32 638	5541
2002	32 197	5806
2003	33 163	6413
2004	34 157	6245

Of these participants, females form an overwhelming majority as evidenced in Figure 1.

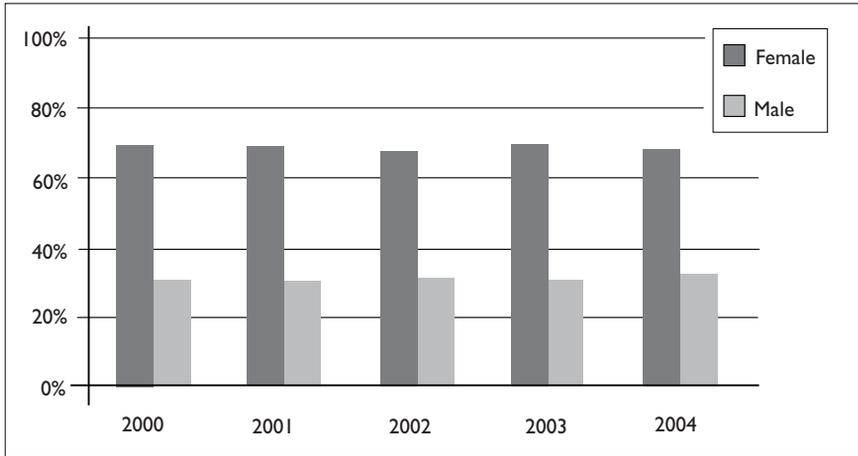


Figure 1: Gender of youth participants, 2000–04

Youth in the AMEP come from a diverse range of countries. However, the ten most represented countries have been relatively constant over the past five years, apart from a significant increase in Ethiopian participants between 2002 and 2003 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Youth participants by country of birth, 2000–04

Rank	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
1	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam
2	China	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon	Lebanon
3	Lebanon	China	China	China	Iraq
4	Iraq	Iraq	Iraq	Iraq	China
5	Turkey	Turkey	Turkey	Sudan	Sudan
6	Sudan	Sudan	Sudan	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia
7	Cambodia	Cambodia	Cambodia	Turkey	Turkey
8	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia	Yugoslavia	Cambodia	Cambodia
9	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Afghanistan	Ethiopia	Ethiopia
10	India	Thailand	Iran	Croatia	Croatia

Many youth participants have had relatively high levels of previous schooling prior to arriving in Australia. For example, between 2000 and 2004, a majority of youth participants (56.3 per cent average) had 11 to 12 years of prior education. However, a sizeable proportion of young people enrolled in

the AMEP have only had between one and seven years of prior schooling (12.9 per cent average), and up to 2 per cent each year report having no formal education at all. Even among the participants with high levels of schooling, it is difficult to ascertain whether their education was disrupted. Learning styles developed through prior study may also have been different from those which are encountered in the AMEP (see Yates 2002) and, coming directly from educational systems, the learning styles that these young people bring with them might be even more entrenched than may be the case with adults.

Of direct interest to this study, though, is the fact that participants with low levels of prior schooling are disproportionately represented in Tasmania. For example, Table 3 shows youth participants by years of schooling in each state and territory in 2004.

Table 3: Youth participants by years of schooling by state, 2004

Years schooling	National N*=6245	ACT N=76	NSW N=2691	NT N=33	QLD N=446	SA N=305	TAS N=61	VIC N=2138	WA N=495
0–7	15.9%	6.6%	13.4%	15.1%	19.0%	13.4%	36.1%	18.0%	18.3%
8–10	24.3%	22.4%	23.4%	15.2%	20.9%	33.4%	26.2%	25.1%	24.8%
11–12	55.6%	68.4%	59.8%	69.7%	56.7%	45.6%	32.8%	51.9%	52.9%
Other	4.2%	2.6%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%	7.6%	4.9%	5.0%	4.0%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

* N = total number of youth participants in each state or territory

These figures are perhaps unsurprising when considered with the data available on the migration categories of youth participants in each state. Nationally, around 75 per cent of youth participants migrate on family visas, while approximately 20–25 per cent arrive on humanitarian/refugee visas (a very small proportion, 2–3 per cent, arrive as skilled migrants). These national figures are typically replicated across most states except for Tasmania and, to a lesser extent, South Australia. In Tasmania in 2004, 78.7 per cent of youth participants were on humanitarian/refugee visas, possibly accounting for the higher than usual numbers of participants with low levels of prior schooling.

The brief overview presented above gives some indication of the broad issues surrounding the migrant youth demographic. First, it is clear that this group is heterogeneous in nationality, level of prior schooling and stability of background. Second, it is clear that demographics change from state-to-state. Consequently, generalisations about this growing migrant youth demographic prove difficult. The next section will give an

overview of some efforts and recommendations that have already been made to address the language education and settlement needs of this diverse group.

LANGUAGE PROGRAMS AND PATHWAYS FOR MIGRANT AND REFUGEE YOUTH

Successful language programs for young migrants and refugees have come to be seen as crucial factors in the wider issues of settlement, health and identity (Coventry et al 2002). Not only does the acquisition of English provide young migrants with tools for orienting themselves to the new culture, but it also increases, exponentially, their knowledge of available pathways. The research detailed below has shown, however, that implementing youth programs can be logistically difficult and requires thorough needs analyses.

The specific language needs of migrant youth were highlighted as early as the mid-1980s in a major study by Rado, Foster and Bradley (1986). With unemployment particularly high in the youth age bracket during this decade, Rado, Foster and Bradley recognised newly arrived, young migrants as a particularly vulnerable group, particularly if their previous education was limited.² Their project, entitled *English language needs of migrant and refugee youth*, used data collected through interviews and classroom observations to compile case studies of young migrants across a variety of language groups. It was found that the systems in place to help these young migrants/refugees were 'piecemeal and largely uncoordinated' (Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986: 4), and so a number of recommendations were made, including:

- The screening of all new arrivals in this age group to ascertain whether they are: 'fully schooled, medium schooled, under schooled ... [or] ... not interested in formal schooling' (Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986: 4).
- The development of materials tailored to the needs of those groups listed above.
- The implementation of a bilingual approach towards migrant and refugee youth.
- The encouragement of parental participation in the development of teaching programs.
- The encouragement of 'social contact with fluent speakers of English in a social setting' (Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986: 6).

With respect to Australian Migrant English Programs, it was recommended that, 'special courses extending for a longer period, up to

two years, [should] operate in the form of an annexe or sub-section of an established institution or AMES [Adult Migrant English Service] for the underschooled' (Rado, Foster and Bradley 1986: 4).

Social contact is an ever-present theme in other studies on the educational needs of migrant youth. In their paper on young non-English-speaking background migrants and refugees in New Zealand, Watts and White (2002) highlight a sense of social detachment. Referring to these young people as the '1.5 generation' because of their arrival in New Zealand before adulthood, they show that forming social networks is the most difficult factor in settlement. This can be particularly important as migrant and refugee youth are 'caught in conflicts between peer group pressures and parental expectations' (Watts and White 2002: 4). The theme is also recurrent in Maiolo and Johnson's (2003) report on youth participants at West Coast AMES. While most long-term students enjoyed social activities but did not request more, the two newest arrivals to the program specifically requested social activities because they had '[little] family and [few] friends to socialize with' (Maiolo and Johnson 2003: 6).

More recently, a report compiled by CMYI on refugee young people in and around Greater Dandenong in Victoria has presented a slightly different set of concerns (CMYI 2004). While the issue of social connectedness is still viewed as an important determinant in the retention of migrant and refugee youth, the CMYI report sees the tailoring of language programs to different youth demographics as essential. Furthermore, in a reflection of Rado, Foster and Bradley's (1986) recommendations, the report identifies 'gaps' in specific policy for young refugees with disrupted schooling. Indeed, the demographic statistics of young new arrivals show that the number of migrants between 18 and 25 who have had limited or disrupted schooling is slowly increasing. The CMYI report argues that this cohort cannot be expected to produce the required levels of proficiency within the six to twelve month period of English instruction granted them under the English as a Second Language New Arrivals Program.

Coventry et al (2002: 81) level a similar criticism at the provision for youth within the AMEP:

The maximum 510 hours of English language learning under the Adult Migrant English Program is insufficient for many young people to acquire the basic language skills needed to gain employment.

They argue that young refugees, in particular, require long-term assistance and early intervention with their language needs. Although Special Preparatory Programs (SPP), introduced by AMES in the late 1990s, went some way towards addressing this issue by increasing the

510-hour entitlement for clients with special needs, their 'less than full-time intensity' (Noy 2001: 9) has had counter-productive effects for youth, as will be shown below.

Overall, previous research on the English language needs of refugee and migrant youth points to two prevailing necessities: (1) young migrants want to feel socially connected, and this sense of orientation will not only assist in their general settlement, but will aid the process of language learning; (2) 'migrant youth' can not be used as a blanket term, and programs aimed at this demographic should be specifically tailored to particular groups based on factors such as level of prior education and future goals.

Research questions

This study was designed to:

- identify the availability of programs specifically aimed at youth through a survey of program managers and coordinators of language and literacy programs;
- identify problems and issues which arise for youth in pursuit of settlement and education in Australia, with a specific focus on the role the AMEP could play in addressing these needs.

Methodology

The project was designed in two stages. In stage 1, a national survey of all AMEP providers was conducted via telephone and email. Program managers were contacted and asked the following questions:

- What are the available data on youth attending these programs?
- What kinds of youth attend these programs? What do they have in the way of educational background?
- How successful are they at retaining the young people in the programs?
- What variety of curricula do the programs cover?
- What are the pathways available to youth following completion of these programs?
- What are specific language needs of these young learners (eg in terms of literacy, speaking skills, specific needs, etc)
- What do coordinators/managers see as the gaps in the programs?

Although the response rate was somewhat disappointing (around 50 per

cent), responses were received from providers in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

For stage 2 of the project, four centres were chosen because their student populations provided a cross-section of migrant youth (16 to 25) demographics. Two of the four centres have developed youth-specific programs, while the other two have a high proportion of young students enrolled in mainstream adult classes.

The data collection for this stage involved three separate methods: first, five classes were observed at all four centres with the aim of understanding how young people interact in class when their classmates are either other young people or older people. Second, focus groups were conducted with six to twelve youth students from selected classes in order to gauge the students' own feelings about their classes. A number of questions were used to stimulate responses in semi-structured interviews, and were designed to elicit as much discussion as possible within the focus group. The following questions were used as a guide to the interviews with all groups:

- Why are you studying here? What do you hope to do in the future?
- Do you feel optimistic about learning English? Why/why not?
- What expectations did you (or your family) have before you came to Australia?
- Have your responsibilities to your family, or to work, affected your studies in any way? If so, how?
- Have you had any other problems since arriving in Australia that have affected your studies?
- (Specifically for students 16 to 18) Why have you chosen to join this program rather than go to high school?
- Are you aware of the different pathways available to you when you finish your course here?
- Do you have any friends who have finished this course? What are they doing now?

An additional set of questions, which varied according to whether the young people were in youth-specific or mainstream classes, was designed to elicit their views on the specific classes they were in. These included questions such as:

- What is the age range of people in your class?

- How do you feel about being in a class with people who are older than/the same age as you?
- What do you like in class?
- Do you like what your teacher is doing?
- What are you learning about? (What topics are covered? Is the curriculum language-based or vocationally oriented?)

Another set of questions addressed issues related to the different educational backgrounds of these learners:

- Do you feel that everyone in your class has a similar level of English?
- What makes you feel confident or uncertain when you're in class using English?
- Do you think everyone in your class wants to achieve the same sorts of things as you?

Finally, interviews with teachers and program directors were conducted in order to ascertain how the programs were meeting the needs of youth, and whether any improvements could be made.

Findings: Stage I

The nationwide survey, by telephone and email, of AMEP service providers identified a number of important issues. However, it should be noted that the initial stage of data collection was not as exhaustive as had been hoped because a number of service providers were either unavailable for interviews, or did not wish to provide specific information on their programs.

PROGRAMS DEVELOPED SPECIFICALLY FORYOUTH

A number of programs specifically designed for youth in the 18 to 26-year-old age group were reported. In Victoria, the Young Adult Migrant Education Course (YAMEC) program is run across three campuses of the Northern Metropolitan Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) (NMIT): Preston, Collingwood and Broadmeadows.

NMIT (2004) also runs Academic English Program for Young Adults (AEPYA). This is a university pathway program for young migrants who have not had disrupted schooling (see Giddens 2004).

At Noble Park AMES Victoria has been running a program designed specifically for youth for many years. The program is designed for young refugee and migrant students, and has been very successful, and has attracted students from a wide variety of geographic locations (see Veal and Andriotis 2004).

In Tasmania, TAFE Tasmania's Adult Migrant English Service is currently involved in projects relating to youth which are coordinated through a sub-committee of the Tasmanian Immigration Settlement Committee. The Youth Issues Working Party is involved in projects addressing social and settlement issues, educational opportunities and employment pathways.

STANDARD AMEP PROGRAMS INVOLVING YOUTH

In New South Wales, we found that youth accounted for a sizeable proportion of the students who enrol in Australian Centre for Languages (ACL) AMEP distance learning courses. The manager of this program identified the mixture of older and younger students in the youth group as somewhat problematic because the needs of 16-year-olds are different from those of 24-year-olds. Some concern was expressed that the AMEP Certificates are too limiting for these students, and that high school qualifications would open more possibilities for study and training for them. The multiple entry and exit points used in the AMEP do not fit well with TAFE admissions, which are twice a year, and students who have to wait a long time to enter TAFE can lose momentum and confidence in their English during this period.

At one ACL centre, almost 30 per cent of the students were aged between 16 and 25, with the majority between 22 and 25. A large majority of these students had between 6 and 12 years of schooling, and currently 55 per cent had 11 and 12 years of schooling. These students usually take 'pre-vocational' courses, and progress to TAFE or employment, but youth-specific courses were not available and they were enrolled in mainstream classes with people at a range of ages.

Findings: Stage 2

Four focus groups were conducted with young learners; two were with learners participating in youth-specific classes and two were with youth in classes that were not youth-specific. Details are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Profile of the focus groups

Group number	Youth-specific	No of students	Interpreter
1	Yes	8	No
2	Yes	14	No
3	No	7	Yes (for 5 students)
4	No	7	No

The data were analysed using content analysis. Four main themes emerged in the focus groups, and provided the basis for coding of

responses under four broad categories: (1) feelings about current class, (2) beliefs about learning with older students, (3) class content and (4) future ambitions.

At each institution, teachers and program managers were also interviewed to ascertain some of the pedagogical and administrative concerns involved in teaching migrant youth.

THE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE

The students across the four focus groups came from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds including Bosnia, Sudan, Turkey, Ethiopia, Egypt, Cambodia, Philippines, Lebanon and Afghanistan. The most homogenous group was the Tasmanian group, where all participants came from either Sudan or Ethiopia, and all spoke either Arabic or Amharic. The students had been living in Australia for different lengths of time ranging from a couple of months to more than two years. Their aspirations ranged from further study at university/TAFE or training as a hairdresser to becoming a welder, carpenter or mechanic.

Generally, all of the students were positive and optimistic about their classes, whether they were in youth-specific classes or not. However, some students in the youth-specific classes, who had previous experience of studying in classes with a range of different age groups, provided useful insights into the differences between these approaches. These students talked of an overall difference in the mood of the class.

Example 1 (focus group 1)

Interviewer: Oh, that's good ... that's great ... how about you said that you studied with adults before ... are you happier in a youth class?

Student: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why do you feel happier?

Student: We can talk some things with youth class we don't ... we can't talk with adults, yeah ...

Interviewer: Is it easier to make friends in a youth class?

Student: Yeah ... yeah, yeah, yeah ... there is atmosphere different ...

Interviewer: Okay, how is the atmosphere different?

Student: It's like boring, it's like no atmosphere ...

Interviewer: You mean in the adult ...

Student: Yeah, yeah, yeah ...

They also felt that older people sometimes attended class only because they were told to by Centrelink.³

Example 2 (focus group 1)

Student: I studied here ... before level youth class was here, I studied in adult class, level zero because level 2 and level 1 were together ... but it was very hard I cannot study with older people because at least some older people come in school because Centrelink say why don't you go to job or school?

Other problems the youth participants recalled encountering were that older students found the classes more difficult, that they dominated the classes and that they spoke in their first language rather than English.

The students in youth-specific AMEP classes also indicated that they preferred to be in these classes rather than in high school situations because they were in a class with people who had more comparable levels of English.

Example 3 (focus group 2)

Interviewer: Yeah ... so do you think this class is better than being in high school or better than being ...

All students: Yeah, much better, much better.

Interviewer: Yeah? Why do you feel that?

Student A: Oh ... there's good learning.

Interviewer: Good learning?

Student A: Yes ... teacher's very good.

Interviewer: Yeah? Yeah? Do you feel less stress or less pressure in this class? If you were in high school or another ...

Student B: Better than high school ... high school's people know English, these people don't know English ... just starting English.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Student B: That's why this class better.

Students studying in mixed-age classes tended to be more reticent about giving their views on their older classmates. Example 4 shows the contradictory views that students in these classes hold.

Example 4 (focus group 4)

- Interviewer: Here at [institution name] you're in classes with people of different ages ... do you feel comfortable studying with people who are older than you?
- Students: [three students] No ...
- Interviewer: No? How do ... a bit uncomfortable? What makes you feel uncomfortable?
- Student A: Like, old people, sometimes, like, Chinese old people come here, cannot speak English ...
- Student B: For me it's okay because maybe come to school and learn English at [institution name] and everyone have to speak English, so I feel comfortable ...
- Interviewer: You're comfortable?
- Student B: Yes, and I like to communicate with the older people, so we are fine ...

It is worth noting that focus group 3 included students who had all had significant levels of prior education. This is in contrast with, for example, focus group 2, in which some students had limited or disrupted prior education. There is some evidence here to suggest that youth-specific classes are felt to be particularly necessary by those students who have had disrupted previous education. This view is reiterated in the views of the educators (see below).

In classes where youth and older adults are mixed, negative perceptions (whether they are accurate or not) of older learners can have implications for motivation. Dörnyei (2001: 29) states that, in the language classroom, achieving a 'cohesive learner group with appropriate group norms' is an essential component of 'basic motivational conditions'. The perceptions of divergent abilities and motivations between generations that have been presented above have the potential to frustrate young students who are anxious to learn. These perceptions could also affect the establishment of a cohesive learner group, and the group's willingness to cooperate. While some of the focus-group questions indirectly addressed the issue of motivation, further investigation of this issue is required before conclusions can be drawn about the impact of mixed classes on the learning motivation of youth.

THE EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVE

Among the educators and administrators who have set up youth-specific programs, the most common observation, and the guiding principle behind the programs themselves, is that young migrant students have different

needs from those who are older. These needs are not only educational, but also social. As one interviewee points out, the three key factors in the lives of many young people in Australia are (1) full-time study, (2) part-time work and (3) social life.

It is vital that youth are engaged in full-time study when they are learning English, however this is not always the case. One SPP observed, which has a high enrolment of youth, is a low-intensity course (three days a week). The director of that program points out that many students leave the program to attend secondary school because they are missing the social aspect of education, and want to be at school at the same time as their peers. Yet entering secondary school too early can be especially problematic for students who have had disrupted or little prior schooling (as we found out from the students' views on high schools reported in Example 3 above).

Youth-specific courses can also tailor the settlement information they deal with to youth-specific needs. In many cases, the settlement needs of older adult students overlap with those of youth; for example, using the bank and understanding the public transport system. However, in one of the two youth-specific classes observed, young students were focusing on writing application letters for summer jobs: a necessary skill, and a common activity, for young people in Australia. Conversely, in an observation of a different 'mixed-age' class, a teacher focused on renting and owning a house – a concept that was not especially relevant to the young students in the class who, it seems, lived with their parents.

One of the youth program directors pointed out the importance of providing as much practical orientation toward working situations as possible, rather than working with theoretical models.

Example 5 (interview with youth program director)

Program director: But doing it step-by-step is a lot easier than just trying to have a conversation and talk in theoretical terms about what other careers there are in Australia, it's too broad, there's no way for them to sort of come into a conversation like that, they can't place themselves in it ... but going to the TAFE at [place] which is our trades campus, they can actually see all the different trades, the hands-on work ... and you know, spark their interest, and just sort of learn what that's called, and it makes it easier for someone to come in and have a conversation with them about what would you like to do? Do you know about all the different trades? And just broaden out the discussion.

The social aspect of youth-specific classes is perhaps the most vital in terms of easing young migrants into settlement in Australia. 'Social' here does not simply refer to organising excursions, though. It also refers to the

social support systems that are in place with teachers and with a class of like-minded peers. Example 6 is excerpted from an interview with another youth program director in which she discusses such issues.

Example 6 (interview with youth program director)

Program director: What they [the students] always say is ‘we’re the same: we have the same problems, we can talk to each other’, because it’s their only friends that they have outside their direct family if you know what I mean ... they don’t have friends like we do with our friends and we can go out for coffee ...

Interviewer: I know, and it must be so much easier for their settlement, I suppose to be ...

Program director: Oh, yeah, I agree ... definitely ...

Interviewer: ... within a social support group.

Program director: Yep, social support, very much of that and, [with] some of them, issues with mother-in-laws and things like that, and they talk to each other or they come and talk to us, like the things we hear ... sometimes you don’t want to hear everything, but ... yeah they see us, their teacher, as the only adult ... like a mother figure, you know? Because there are males in the class, but there are no male teachers but they come and tell us everything, you know, which is really good.

It is clear, then, that teaching youth-specific classes requires different skills from those employed when teaching older-adult classes. Program directors suggest that teachers of youth classes need to be highly motivated and energetic, as well as strict with lateness, absences etc. Also, because of the need for social activities, many centres require more resources to maintain (or set up) youth-specific programs, although this can be done quite cheaply and maintained with student initiative.

CLASS CONTENT

Both students and teachers talked about the kinds of activities that appeared most productive with these young people. Speaking and conversational skills are highly valued by this group of learners, both in youth-specific and general classes.

Example 7 (focus group 1)

- Interviewer: What kinds of activities do you enjoy?
- Student 3: Conversation ... conversation, yeah.
- Interviewer: So, you like to speak ...
- Student 3: Yeah, if we speak we can study English more ...
- Interviewer: Right ... do you think speaking is a very important skill?
- Students: Yeah.

Classroom observations revealed that games and quizzes were prominent parts of the lesson in the youth-specific classes, and all students appeared enthusiastic in their participation. Young students appeared to enjoy activities that involved movement and a sense of competition. It was noted from the observation notes that in the youth classes the general demeanor of the classroom was more relaxed, and students were able to call out and participate in a less formal way than was generally the case in the mixed classes. However, this did not mean that there was no discipline in the class and, in fact, one of the teachers commented on the importance of setting limits, such as for lateness, for example.

Example 8 (interview with youth program director)

- Program director: Yeah, they want that because it shows you care, whereas if you let them come in late and leave early it's like you don't care ...

Summary and future directions

There is certainly evidence to suggest that where they do exist, migrant youth-specific education programs are both successful and necessary. Not only do the teachers see the worth of youth-specific programs, but the students, themselves, are overwhelmingly positive about their studies in these classes. This is not to say that all migrants between the ages of 16 and 25 need to, or indeed should, enter a youth-specific class. However, for young migrants, particularly those with disrupted or limited prior education, studying in a class with peers can deliver enormous benefits.

Yet where youth programs exist, they seem to be isolated. There tends to be limited awareness among many AMEP providers of the types of youth programs that are offered by other providers. More research and sharing of knowledge is required to enable centres which wish to implement youth programs to do so with knowledge of 'best practice'.

A number of future directions, which could improve the provision of English language education to migrant youth in the AMEP, are possible. First, youth programs need not be developed in every AMEP centre, but where numbers warrant it, a 'catch-all' program, similar to the program being run at Noble Park AMES (see Veal and Andriotis 2004) could be set up in a particular location and youth could then be specifically referred to the program even if they were not immediately local to it. Second, teachers of youth-specific programs need to be carefully selected so that they are sympathetic to the particular issues that young people face and enthusiastic about working with young people. Moreover, specific training modules for teachers of youth programs need to be implemented. Such training needs to include awareness about pathways to further education and training; this could include attendance at TAFE and university open days, as well as finding out about admission procedures and requirements. Knowledge about youth programs needs to be shared more widely, so that those providers who wish to set up youth programs do not feel isolated, and can draw on the expertise of those who have had experience of working in such programs. Finally, the importance to young adult migrants of peer interaction and social support needs to be recognised and implemented, both in youth and mixed-age classes.

In addition to such practical measures, further research is required into the issues surrounding youth in adult migrant English programs. Regarding the AMEP, a broader and more detailed survey of provision for youth is needed. The current study was only able to attain responses from approximately 50 per cent of providers. Also, to supplement the views of young migrants in this study, the views of older adult learners could be attained and analysed in a similar way. As mentioned above, it would be enlightening to investigate the particular factors affecting motivation for young migrants, to see whether there is a tangible advantage to being in a youth-specific class.

NOTES

- 1 We are very grateful to Bruce Hamilton of the National Management Information Unit for providing us with these data, and to DIMIA for permission to use them.
- 2 Rado, Foster and Bradley (1986: 3) defined 'youth' as those aged between 15 and 19, who thus were 'post-compulsory schooling stage'.
- 3 Centrelink is an Australian Government agency, which provides a variety of services to the community, including information about training and jobs, and financial support to families and individuals whilst they are training and looking for work.

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