Working with Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Education Settings

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Overview

- Knowledge gained in the working with Refugee background and asylum seekers Students
- Understanding impact of prolonged detention, uncertainty and family separation on young people seeking asylum while waiting visa outcomes.
- Skills and knowledge needed to work with this highly vulnerable group
- Establishing relationships with students and families
- Catering for educational needs
Responding with appropriate and adequate programs to students with very high needs and no first language literacy remains a great challenge for education departments (Brown, et al, 2006)

- Disrupted education or no substantive schooling.
- Have little or no literacy in either a first or second language prior to arrival.
- Have little knowledge of the routines of school and expectations
- Trauma issues that can be disrupting to learning.
Continued

- open to learning opportunity but difficult to go through required works.
- Slow process with modelling/intensive support.
- Australian's school system is new and complex for young people and their families to understanding.
- Students can be aggressive and withdraw as lack of understanding work.
- Remain anxious and unable to concentrate or hyperactive in class.
Understanding impact of trauma and family separation on young people seeking asylum.

- Anxiety
- Panic attacks; shock responses
- Flashbacks
- Depression
- Grief reactions or disconnection/numbing
- Sleeping problems, irritability or aggressiveness
- Emotional stress and eating disorders
- Inability to plan for the future
- Pre-occupation with the past
Key issues of concern for refugees

- Financial hardship due to lack of employment
- Finding employment and/or being under-employed
- Finding secure accommodation
- Engaging in education and learning English.
- Balancing maintenance of cultural practices with integration into Australian culture.
- Mental health needs often remain unmet.
Lack of social capital.
Experiences of discrimination and racism.
Tracing friends and family still in danger.
Supporting friends and family overseas through remittances or sponsorship.
Skills and knowledge needed to work with this highly vulnerable group

- willing to supports.
- Accommodate students absence/lateness due to other responsibilities and commitments.
- Accept that other professionals may be better placed (than themselves) to provide settlement advice to learners.
- Provide many opportunities for repetition and recycling of material.
- Develop teaching strategies that tap into the learning strategies that people from highly oral cultures use to learn language.
What needs to be done?

- Community integration is particularly important for people from refugee backgrounds to rebuild their social capital and feeling of belonging.

- Treat people with respect and dignity and value their skills, knowledge and experience.

- Opportunities to promote physical and mental wellbeing (Tipping, 2010, Refugee Council of Australia, 2010).
Establishing relationships with students and families

- Good relationship comprised of respecting and sharing ideas and provides support when needed.
- Discuss cultural values with Sudanese community members and learners (if possible)
- Incorporate cultural similarities and differences explicitly into lesson content
- Build in success by pitching learning activities at the appropriate level of difficulty
- Explain that learner error is part of learning.
- Take care not to single out weaker learners in feedback sessions or teacher questioning
Good working relationships with clients who have experienced torture and trauma

- Listen and respond respectfully
- Behave sensitively when clarifying or asking for further information related to their history.
- If the client is angry or depressed, validate the client’s feelings by acknowledging their distress, for example: “I acknowledge/can hear you are feeling angry/upset.”
- Acknowledge their strengths, provide hope and never dehumanise them because of their status.
Catering for educational needs

- Normal school work can be daunting task for students.
- Supports them to learn basic words and social communication skills e.g. Basic writing and speaking.
- Actively seek to understand learners’ current knowledge and skills.
- Be ready to explain anything the learners do not know.
- Incorporate regular and systematic vocabulary development activities into the teaching program.
- Provide opportunities for hands-on learning to use new things.
- Consider community development approaches that include consulting and working with ethnic community.
How to maintain resilience and reflective practice?

- Value differences in culture and language.
- Be aware that a person is seeking your support.
- Be ready to learn from them.
- Seek support from skilled people when necessary.
- Recognise the warning signs of vicarious trauma.
- Be aware of your own cultural norms and world view and how this influences your work.
- Have an open mind and global view when working with different groups.
Questions and Discussion
References

- Tipping, S. 2010. Meaningful Being: The experiences of Young Sudanese–Australians, PhD research, University of Melbourne
- Refugee Council of Australia, (2010) A Bridge to a New Culture Promoting the participation of refugees in sporting activities, abridged report, NSW