

(Un)Common Ground?: English Language Acquisition and Experiences of Exclusion Amongst New Arrival Students in Australian Primary Schools

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Abstract

Whilst there is a lack of empirical research examining the acquisition of English language skills and its relationship to sense of belonging amongst refugees and other migrants in Australia, much of the published literature assumes that a straightforward relationship exists between the two. This paper presents contrary findings from a study of two South Australian primary schools with New Arrivals Programmes (NAPs). Combining data from a questionnaire administered to teachers with ethnographic observations of children at play in the school yard and a critical examination of previous literature on the topic, this paper argues that students in NAPs will be differentially invested in learning English according to the degree of exclusion they experience in the school environment and the impact this has upon their perception of the value of learning English as a mode of engagement. In response, the paper calls for an approach to education that is situated in global contexts of colonisation and power relations, and where the terms for inclusion of NAP students are mutually negotiated, rather than pre-determined.

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Introduction

Whilst migration to Australia in the mid twentieth century may be conceptualised as having primarily involved individuals and families opting to undertake planned migration, the past two decades have witnessed a considerable change in the reasons for migration. Whilst skilled worker migration continues to occur, a significant proportion of people may be considered forced immigrants, particularly those fleeing countries affected by ongoing war and poverty (Mares, 2001).

Unfortunately, however, the government response to such forced migration has less often been one that has evoked recognition of Australia's location in a global context of colonisation and its continuing effects upon nations outside of the overdeveloped west. Rather, the response on the part of the Australian government has typically been to depict those seeking asylum as 'illegal', undeserving, and as a drain upon the nation's resources (Tayebjee, 2005). One outcome of such depictions has been an injunction upon refugees to 'prove' their worth as 'good citizens' able to integrate successfully into an 'Australian way of life'. This is best exemplified by then Prime Minister John Howard's 2006 evocation of Greek migrants as a shining example of 'good assimilation', where 'good' was measured by Howard as the ability to willingly adopt 'Australian values'. Such notions of 'good' assimilation are, of course, always placed in direct contrast with what are deemed to be examples of 'bad' or 'failed' assimilation, characterised by wilful refusal to integrate, a tendency towards 'ghettoisation',

and the upholding of cultural values from countries of origin over and above those promoted by the Australian nation.

Such constructions of migrants according to a schema of 'good' and 'bad' assimilation has significant implications for the ways in which Australian citizens in general understand the lives of refugees in the contemporary context. For example, government rhetoric that is seen as endorsing a pathologising view of refugees may be taken as justification for paternalistic understandings of migration where the Australian nation is seen as 'generously' extending inclusion to refugees, despite their 'illegality' (in the instance of those who arrive other than through official channels such as humanitarian visa programmes). Such a paternalistic understanding allows the Australian nation and its citizens to ignore both its own colonial history (and the status of non-indigenous people as ourselves migrants in illegal possession of land), and the location of Australia within a global colonial history that continues to produce the disparities we see between overdeveloped and 'third world' nations (Sidhu & Christie, 2002). Focusing on procedural, rather than relational, understandings of forced migration thus allows Australia to be positioned largely outside of the complex colonial histories of which it is an active part, and through which it may be suggested the demand for forced migration is produced (Matthews, 2008).

Of course not all Australian citizens will take such messages about refugees and migration up unquestioningly. However it is likely to be the case that many will, and it is thus important for us to consider the implications of this for both

refugees (and other migrants) themselves, and for those who may work with these populations in situations not necessarily of their choosing. One such instance where this occurs is in schools that include a New Arrivals Programme (NAP). Importantly, it must be noted that whilst much of our emphasis thus far has been upon depictions and treatment of refugees in Australia, not all NAP students are refugees. At the two schools in which we constructed research, refugees accounted for approximately 30% of the NAP student population. Nonetheless, our point holds that general public understandings of all migrants based on assumptions about the legality of their migration stand to negatively impact upon their treatment, regardless of the reasons for their migration. Furthermore, and as writers such as Pugliese (2003) and Hage (1998) have suggested, stereotypes of the 'third world person' or someone being of 'Middle Eastern appearance' play a considerable role in determining the terms on which inclusion is offered to certain groups of people. The majority of NAP students observed as part of this study would certainly be simplistically identified by many as falling into these categories, thus again reiterating the impact that assumptions about migrancy status (regardless of whether or not they accurately reflect the reality of any given individual) have upon the treatment of students in NAPs.

In order to examine more closely how assumptions about contemporary migration in Australia impact upon migrants and the terms upon which inclusion is offered to them, we provide in this paper an analysis of data collected from two South Australian schools with a New Arrivals Programme, and we

place this alongside previous Australian research on English language acquisition by non English speaking migrants (primarily refugees). By critically examining 1) this previous research, 2) the reports of teachers working in schools with NAPs, and 3) observed interactions that occurred between NAP and non-NAP students in the school yards, we highlight some of the normative assumptions that appear to exist amongst both researchers and teachers in relation to the learning of English, and in particular the assumption that the ability to be considered a 'good' citizen is at least in part premised upon a willingness to learn English (Woods, 2009). Following this, we outline the differential investments that students in NAPs may have in learning English according to their experiences of English as a tool used to enact marginalisation, and the resistances they make to this.

Importantly, and as academics rather than primary school educators, our interest here is not to demonise educators or educational researchers, but rather to examine how normative understandings of migration, citizenship and education play out in the practices of teachers (and educational researchers). Certainly, we are mindful of the challenges that all Australian educators face in relation to limited resources and choices in relation to teaching opportunities. As such, our argument is not *against* the important work being done by educators within the context of schools that include NAPs, but rather *for* a potentially differential allocation of resources that recognises the pragmatic (rather than instrumental) teaching of English. Our interest is also in an understanding of language acquisition that goes further than debates over pathologising (i.e.,

individualising) vs. contextual accounts of the experiences of refugees, and instead elaborates one where schools as a whole reconsider what it means to engage in inclusive practices. Such an approach extends beyond the actual teaching of English (whilst nonetheless recognising the complexities facing both NAP students and those involved in their education), and encompasses a focus on how schools can resist the injunction to produce docile citizens unable to critically examine ongoing power relations on a global scale.

The Study

The present study was initially conceived as an examination of prejudice within primary schools in South Australia, but developed through consultation with the South Australian Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) into an exploration of the use of school spaces by students in primary schools that include a New Arrivals Programme (NAP). Ethics approval was granted both by the researchers' University and by DECS. Two schools were approached for involvement in the study, both of which were enthusiastic about the utility of the project in assessing how inclusion operates within their school, and how that inclusion may be hindered. In order to preserve the anonymity of the schools, they are referred to throughout as Hills Primary School and Plains Primary School.

The study has involved three forms of data collection. First, an ethnography of the school yards was undertaken, with a focus on how NAP and non-NAP

students use the spaces. The ethnography involved the second author spending considerable time developing rapport with individual NAP classes and teachers, and then spending time over eight consecutive weeks in the yards of both schools during lunch times making observations. The second author then proceeded to invite individual students from both NAP and non-NAP classes to photograph their play spaces and to then engage in focus groups to discuss the images and their meaning for the students. The third form of data was a questionnaire developed to determine teacher opinions about the school space and the inclusion of NAP students. Questionnaires were provided to a total of eleven NAP teachers and twenty non-NAP teachers across both schools (Responses were received from six of the NAP teachers and fifteen of the non-NAP teachers). Teachers received an information sheet detailing the study, and were required to sign a consent form. Two separate envelopes were provided so the teachers were able to return the questionnaire in one and the consent form in the other. The questionnaire was a combination of questions with responses on Likert scales, together with open ended questions in which teachers were given spaces to write their views. Teachers' views were also documented within the field notes as teachers at both schools frequently initiated conversations with the second author either in the yard or in the classroom during the ethnography phase of the study.

The findings presented below focus primarily upon data drawn from the questionnaires, though this is supplemented with data from the ethnographic phase of the research, including the reporting of instances where the second author was privy to teacher's opinions about English language use by NAP

students. Whilst it could be argued that teacher's voices should be presented alongside student's opinions in relation to English language use and the actual policies of DECS in relation to teaching English to NAP students, it was felt that this would not do justice to each of these three populations. As such, this paper should be viewed as one component of a three-part examination of how normative understandings of language acquisition play out in two South Australian primary schools.

Language Acquisition and the Terms of Inclusion

Our review of existing literature relating to English language acquisition by migrants to Australia and its impact upon success in migration found little published empirical data supporting a clear relationship between the two. Yet despite this, much of the published research advocates strongly for English as a central aspect of supporting the integration of NAP students into life in Australia. For example, Ollif and Couch (2005) state that "English represents the key to a possible future" and that "the central role that English proficiency plays in determining successful integration of migrants into Australia society has been well documented" (p. 42). Claims such as these are made despite the lack of evidence relating English proficiency to 'successful integration'. Similar suppositions about the importance of English language acquisition were made by teachers in the present study. Of the teachers who completed the questionnaire, over 75% rated as significant (8 or higher on a scale where 10 represented 'greatly') the impact of

NAP students' level of English upon interactions between NAP and non-NAP students.

Qualitative responses to this question also indicated that (primarily non-NAP) teachers at both schools felt that English was essential to the likelihood of interactions between NAP students and the broader society. Examples include: "NAP children need good English so they can smoothly transition" and "the more English they speak the easier it is for them to interact". One teacher also indicated that they felt that non-NAP students who initially had intentions to 'buddy up' with NAP students did not persevere due to the language difference. Whilst we would not argue *per se* against the role that language differences play in facilitating or inhibiting interaction, our concern here is that when the injunction is placed upon NAP students to learn English, there is little corollary injunction placed upon non-NAP students to engage with and learn from NAP students. Thus power relations which already exist in the broader community are reinforced within the school environment, a point discussed in more detail later in the paper.

This injunction upon NAP students to learn English is echoed in research by Woods (2009) on the opinions of teachers in NAP schools in Queensland. Whilst Woods provides a range of critical insights as to how schools can be more politically aware of their institutional location within histories of colonisation (a point we return to in the conclusion), she nonetheless endorses the idea that it is the role of NAP students to conform to the dominant Australian culture. As she states: "Learning important cultural content... allows refugee students a safe

space to reconcile their own cultures with a new culture... The explicit teaching of values and cultural knowledge within a space of reconciliation – not integration – is vital” (p. 96). Again, whilst we would not argue against schools being a possible (and indeed important) site in which NAP students are taught about the cultural context they are now living in, Woods evocation of reconciliation could well be argued to epitomise what Nicoll (2004) terms ‘reconciliation to’, rather than ‘reconciliation with’: It is about a marginalised group of people being reconciled to their marginal position, rather than the two cultural groups meeting half way and negotiating terms for inclusion that are respectful of the histories of both groups. In other words, Woods provides an account of reconciliation that despite being constructed as in opposition to ‘integration’, is perhaps closer to an understanding of reconciliation as resignation to life *under* a ‘new culture’, rather than life *with* another culture. This can be seen even more clearly in Woods’ statement that: “The second role of education is to develop citizenship and work to build access and participation in a civil society. This requires a commitment to creating an ethical, tolerant space for refugee young people to reconcile their culture and values with those of Australia” (p. 98). Clearly, reconciliation here is about being reconciled *to* on the part of the marginalised group, rather than both groups being reconciled with one another on shared terms.

Similar assumptions about what constitutes inclusion on the basis of language appeared to have shaped some of the informal statements made to the second author during the ethnographic phase. Teachers of non-NAP students at both schools reported of their own volition that they believed ‘integration’ (their

words) to be stymied by a lack of English on the part of NAP students, and furthermore, that this 'lack' is something that must be remedied by NAP students themselves (i.e., that if there is a bridge to be built between NAP and non-NAP students, that the bridge building work must be undertaken by NAP students). There appeared to be little reflexivity amongst teachers that integration must be a two-way street, with those in the position of relative power being willing to engage in dialogue about possible conflicting needs and agendas in relation to the terms on which inclusion is set.

A concrete example of this normalisation of integration as necessarily the work of NAP students appeared in the oft-made statement that 'it is just natural' that students segregate on the basis of cultural differences. This type of statement was made by many teachers across both schools, typically in response to verbal observations made by the second author in conversation with teachers in the school yard that there appeared to be little interaction between NAP and non-NAP students. Again, this type of statement, whilst no doubt not intended to marginalise NAP students, nonetheless served to legitimate the exclusion that NAP students experience, and furthermore to render invisible the power differences between students in regard to who determines inclusion.

This normalisation of integration as primarily the work of NAP students was also evidenced in the relegation of school-wide attempts at inclusion of NAP students and their cultures to specific days or places. For example, when asked to list places in which students from NAP and non-NAP came together, teachers

frequently listed one-off events such as 'Harmony Day'. The implicit suggestion from this is that non-NAP students are only required to be actively inclusive during events, thus giving the message that during the remainder of the time inclusion is not a primary directive for non-NAP students.

The findings presented in this section highlight the limitations of assuming that English language acquisition is the 'key to success' for NAP students. Such assumptions are reliant upon a very normative account of language acquisition that places the onus upon NAP students to 'integrate', or otherwise be labelled as having 'failed to reconcile'. As we elaborate further in the following section, power differentials that exist within school environments may be seen to shape the investment that NAP students will have in learning English, and that a lack of English may not necessarily be the only determinant of successful interactions between NAP and non-NAP students.

Power Differentials and Investment in English

In an incisive paper on the relationship between investments in learning English and its perception as a form of cultural capital by non-English speaking (NES) migrants, Norton Pierce (1995) suggests that the belief that, given the opportunity, NES migrants will easily and willingly learn English, fails to recognise that the learning of language always occurs on a particular social terrain in which those who already know the language hold considerable power.

This was evident in one particular interaction observed between a NAP and a non-NAP student in the playground. During one lunch hour at Hills Primary School, a young girl from a non-NAP class was observed running with a ball that a young boy from a NAP class had been playing with. Running behind her was the boy himself, calling out “thank you, thank you” in an effort to claim back the ball from the girl who had stolen it from him. Ignoring him, the girl threw the ball to another non-NAP student who was in the area, but the ball hit a railing and bounced back to the child who originally had the ball, who grabbed it and ran off. This type of incident, whilst seemingly insignificant, echoes findings from an ethnographic study conducted by van Ausdale and Feagin (2002), in which they observed the learning of racial categories and enactments of racism amongst nursery school-aged children. As they suggest, it is in mundane, everyday examples such as these that we see power differentials operate to the exclusion of marginalised groups of students. Of course, on one level, game-play amongst children often involves the claiming of another’s territory or possessions, and this in and of itself does not necessarily constitute marginalisation. But when we consider the broader picture of the ability (or otherwise) of a student to verbally resist this type of game play (other than saying ‘thank you’), the power struggles that shape language differences become more visible. It is such relations of power that we suggest need more attention within the school environment.

Clearly this example may be viewed by some as supporting the supposition that English language acquisition is vital to integration. However, we would suggest

the need for a slightly more nuanced argument; namely that regardless of the practical utility of being able to speak up for oneself in a situation where one is in a marginal position, the ability to do so will always be moderated by the willingness of other people to listen. To return to our previous point, then, the work of inclusion cannot be seen as reliant primarily upon the ability of NAP students to learn English and resist marginalisation: the work of inclusion must instead be focused upon the capacity of the entire school to resist marginalising practices and to shift the focus away from permitting English language capacity to determine the terms on which inclusion operates.

The assumption that a lack of English prohibits NAP students from engaging with non-NAP students was also highlighted in data obtained regarding participation in sport and English. Whilst some teachers stated in written responses on the questionnaire that lack of English impeded engagement in sports, as seen in comments such as: “NAP students don’t feel confident enough to ask to join in a game, don’t understand rules, so won’t be able to effectively communicate to other members of a team if it is a team sport they are playing”, other teachers stated informally to the second researcher that they felt that sport was precisely one instance where students *could* play together regardless of their language skills. This highlights the difference noted earlier between instrumental usage of English (where NAP students may have little capacity to engage in forms of interaction under testable circumstances that require English literacy), and comprehension of English-based cultural interactions (where NAP students may have considerable skills in other areas that facilitate interactions,

such as sport). Certainly previous research on NAP students and social interaction has found that male NAP students are likely to engage in sports-based interactions that facilitate points of contact with non-NAP students (Brown, Miller & Mitchell, 2006), and that NAP students themselves point to the benefits of sports and other community activities to assist in the development of a sense of belonging (Miller, 1997).

As such, sport could be considered an example of an area in which English language acquisition is able to occur in an arena that is less restricted by existing power relations that lead to a situation in which migrants are required to learn English before they are considered to have anything to contribute. Of course, sport would not be the only example in which such an exchange is able to take place (and in many cases power relations may still be evident in sports games), but it is nonetheless an example of a way in which interactions between non-NAP and NAP students are able to exceed simply knowing how to speak English in ways which are able to be quantified and tested. Many of the NAP students (especially boys) observed in the two primary schools were very keen to play sport at lunch times, and many were considered very talented, despite having English language skills that were weak enough to be in a NAP class. In fact, at Plains Primary School an African refugee NAP student was made Vice-Captain of a Sports team despite low levels of English proficiency, indicating the strong contribution that NAP students can make to the school environment regardless of their English skills.

As we suggested in the previous section, when inclusion for NAP students is set by schools and educational researchers on terms that emphasise English language acquisition, this can serve to further marginalise NAP students. In this section we have demonstrated how the injunction to learn English not only fails to recognise other ways in which cross cultural interactions occur (as the example of sports highlights above), but it also ignores the power differentials that shape investments in learning English. In the following section we further examine the effects of ongoing exclusion toward NAP students in relation to investments in English language acquisition.

Exclusion and its Relationship to Resistance to Language Acquisition

Much of the previous research on language acquisition by NAP students may be epitomised as emphasising either individual responsibility for learning, or the role that the individual histories that refugees (in particular) bring with them play in language acquisition. Matthews (2008) rightly suggests that we must be suspicious of the former emphasis, as it largely fails to examine the role of nations such as Australia in perpetuating pathologising approaches to individuals seeking asylum, such as we outlined in our introduction. Matthews also suggests, however, that we must be suspicious of accounts that over-emphasise previous traumas. Such suspicion may at first seem counterintuitive, as it would seem appropriate to recognise previous trauma and its negative impact upon refugees. Matthews' point, however, is that focusing on trauma can tend towards producing individualised accounts of trauma, which can thus circuitously return us to the

individual as the primary site of intervention. Whilst of course psychological support may well be necessary for many refugees, it cannot be the only response evoked by trauma.

Part of the response, as we have already stated, must also be to recognise the complicity of western nations such as Australia in the colonising dynamics that have produced the wars and national debts which have resulted in the 'third world' status from which many seeking asylum flee. Yet another aspect of the response to trauma must be to examine how trauma is perpetuated against refugees when they arrive in nations such as Australia (most obviously when they are placed in mandatory detention, but also in everyday acts of racism post-detention). Finally, a primary emphasis upon trauma fails to recognise that refugees will often bring with them strengths and resistance to marginalisation: as Matthews suggests, "it is because of their independence, not their dependence, that people become refugees in the first place" (p. 40).

Cassity and Gow (2005) suggest that for refugee children, schools are often a first point of contact with 'Australian culture', and thus will shape the views that they develop of their new home. In relation to our points above about trauma, it is important then to consider what it means for NAP students (many of whom are refugees) who have negative experiences of education in Australia. Our questionnaire data would suggest that NAP students in the two schools involved in the present study experience ongoing racism in the school context. 75% of teachers who responded indicated they had seen instances of racism in the school

environment, and of these 50% indicated that this was directed toward NAP students. If these numbers are indeed indicative of what students experience in the two schools, the message that NAP students may receive is perhaps more complex than one that emphasises English as a path to ‘integration’. Rather, English may be seen a tool of discrimination, with English language used to exacerbate differences between groups and to marginalise NAP students. Certainly analyses of language use by critical social psychologists would suggest that constructions of refugees that circulate in the Australian media serve to marginalise the experiences of refugees (Augoustinos & Every, 2007; O’Doherty & Augoustinos, 2008; Due, 2008).

Of course it isn’t only the case that English is imposed upon NAP students as a means of integration or as a form of discrimination. English is also resisted by some students, as we found in our observations. Following both Norton Peirce (1995) and Matthews (2008), we would suggest that in some situations, especially in the context of institutionalised racism, *not* speaking is a form of resistance and agency that in effect speaks back to those who would seek to force integration upon refugee or other migrant bodies and voices. Norton Peirce, citing examples from adult English as a second language courses, suggests that if we recognise the differences between power *over* (i.e., power as control exerted over an individual) and power *to* (i.e., power to assert one’s agency and choice), we can begin to see where resistances occur. This is of course not to suggest that silence should have to be the preferred option for NAP students in schools (and there is a much wider debate that must be recognised in relation to how silence is often forced upon

refugee bodies to the point where practices such as 'lip sewing' become intelligible (Hoenig, 2009)). Nonetheless, the injunction to speak in order to integrate may well be resisted in ways that are productive for NAP students.

A number of key observations from our ethnographic data demonstrate these points. Many of the teachers who spoke to the second author during lunch times stated that English was a barrier to NAP and non-NAP children playing together. However some of the teachers in our research also stated that NAP students from a range of cultural backgrounds play together, despite not having a shared language. Previous studies (e.g., Miller, 1997) have also found instances of children in ESL classes forming friendships across language barriers. During the ethnographic period a small group of children at Plains Primary School were observed doing precisely this: Two children from Mongolia and two other children from Iran were seen often playing together despite not having a shared language. These children were observed to have made opportunities for play that exceeded the lack of a shared language, yet no observations were made of NAP and non-NAP students doing the same. Some teachers suggested that this difference was about confidence levels, where NAP students may feel confident to speak with other ESL students, but not with non-NAP students who have English as a first language. Whilst we concede the merits of this explanation, we would suggest further that there is some utility in also viewing these selective play behaviours as agency on the part of children who may view themselves as marginalised by English speaking students, and who, despite their own differences, may prefer to play together in resistance to this marginalisation.

If we are to return to the idea of investment outlined in the previous section, we may see that whilst NAP students may have some degree of investment in learning English (whether this is determined by their own interests or by their families or communities), they may also be invested in maintaining space away from English speakers who hold the capacity to discriminate. This again suggests that notions of 'English learning as paramount' fail to adequately understand the meaning of language acquisition in the lives of NAP students in Australian schools. Whilst NAP students will almost certainly bring with them experiences of trauma, this does not necessarily tell us anything about their investment in 'integration'. As opposed to the naïve assumption that recovery from trauma requires English language skills to enable inclusion within the broader Australian community, thinking critically about new traumas which may occur within Australia provides us with ways to consider the terms that NAP students may set for their own commitment to learning, and the reticence they may display that has little if anything to do with individual pathology, and everything to do with pathological constructions of refugees as a whole and the discrimination that comes from this for migrants (whether they be refugees or not).

Implications for Practice

Whilst recognising previous calls made in the literature for education for NAP students that focuses on the backgrounds of these students (rather than

pathologising such students), this paper has argued for education which not only addresses this point, but which goes further in considering the ways in which education can be provided to NAP students through methods that recognise and account for unequal power relations between NAP (and especially refugee) students and non-NAP students. The demonisation of asylum seekers by many institutions in Australia, combined with the onus being placed on NAP students to learn English in order to integrate, leads to a situation in which many NAP students are under pressure to speak English not only in order to achieve good outcomes at school, but also to be perceived as fitting into the school environment, and thus the broader Australian community.

This expectation of NAP students to 'fit in' was seen frequently in teacher responses regarding the use of English, and the segregation of NAP and non-NAP students in the yard. This paper has argued throughout that such segregation is not due simply to the fact that one group of students speaks English, and the other does not, but is instead reflective of the different cultural capital held by NAP and non-NAP students, which results in non-NAP students potentially having the power to marginalise or exclude NAP students. A follow on effect of this, as we have suggested, is that NAP students may see English as a tool which is used against them, rather than solely as a stepping stone to belonging.

As such, we would suggest that there is a pressing need for educational approaches which afford both NAP and non-NAP students opportunities to

understand the differential power relations they may encounter in the immediate school environment and the broader global context, which position those who speak fluent English as automatically belonging in western nations such as Australia. Such forms of education require the teaching of critical reflexivity regarding Australia's location in histories of colonisation, particularly in relation to the countries from which NAP students come. Specific examples of this include Australia contributing troops to wars which have displaced many thousands (if not millions) of people, current trade agreements which strongly reinforce the 'third-world' status of many countries, and legacies of empire building that continues to have significant effects both within Australia and abroad (Matthews, 2008). This historical and current background functions to reinforce the power of non-NAP students, a fact that is ignored in much of the literature that places the responsibility for 'assimilating', 'integrating' or 'belonging' firmly in the hands of migrants themselves. Acknowledgement of these power relations and the responsibility Australia has towards marginalised groups of people would allow schools to consider how they are complicit with the injunction to produce docile citizens who do not critique existing power differentials.

Whilst many teachers within this study argued that the main reason NAP students were not seen playing with non-NAP students in the school yard (and vice versa) was that NAP students were not proficient enough in English, this only tells part of the story. What is hidden by this emphasis upon non-NAP students is that language acquisition potentially benefits not only those who

have migrated to Australia (for whatever reason), but the Australian nation more broadly (such as in relation to the skills and knowledges that migrants bring with them to Australia, which stand to benefit the nation). As such, we would suggest that the Australian nation itself is very much invested in depicting English language acquisition as the work of migrants precisely because of the benefits that arise from language acquisition for the nation. Whilst of course a sense of belonging or inclusion is important to the wellbeing of any individual, a sense of cohesion and a 'productive workforce' is also important to a nation founded upon such ideals.

The small sample size from which the data were obtained in this study of course means that the findings are not necessarily applicable to all schools offering New Arrival Programmes. However, taken together with the critical analysis of previous literature, the data do suggest that, however well-intentioned, the current way in which the location of NAP students and their English language acquisition is understood within the two schools observed serves to reinforce the power relations existing in broader Australian society between newly arrived migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and the broader Australian community. In order to address these differential power relations, the teaching of English in schools must be re-oriented so as to be seen as a tool or resource which is able to help refugees and other migrants to meet their goals in an English-speaking country, rather than as a pre-requisite to belonging in Australia. Such belonging must be offered despite language acquisition, rather than only once English has been acquired. This could potentially involve

recognising the strengths that NAP students bring with them, such as through sport, art or music classes which, as discussed earlier through use of the sports example, do not rely on knowledge of English.

Of course, creating a more equal society is not only the responsibility of schools but also of the broader Australian society. However, as an important point of contact between NAP and non-NAP children and their families, schools are in a unique and important position to begin to create a society in which refugees and other migrants are valued and seen to belong in their own right, rather than only once they have gained a certain level of cultural capital by speaking English at a desired standard. As such, and whilst recognising the utility of being able to communicate in the language most used in a country, it is equally important that schools and communities recognise their own investment in teaching NAP students English, as well as the investments which students themselves may have to either learn or resist speaking English. Recognition of these factors would be one step towards acknowledging that it is not solely the case that once children arrive in Australia they need to be taught English in order to belong and succeed in Australian society.

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