Guiding the Way: How ESOL Teachers Can Support Refugee-Background Students Transitioning to Mainstream Tertiary Studies

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Abstract

Many refugee-background students from a variety of pathways enter mainstream tertiary studies in their countries of resettlement. Yet, despite having an English level sufficient to enter these courses, a growing body of research suggests these students face a number of challenges that make succeeding in tertiary studies difficult. Through the transformative paradigm and a critical perspective, this thesis explores my experiences as an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) teacher and those of five Middle Eastern refugee-background students about to start the next stage of their learning journey. By using two focus groups and an action research project, we work together to investigate ways that ESOL teachers can best support this cohort of students in their transition into mainstream studies. This thesis concludes with The COMPASS Model, designed as a result of this study to assist in guiding ESOL teachers to support refugee-background students through the use of Collaboration, Orientation, Multiple literacies, Personalised learning, Advocacy, Strategising and Self-care. Suggestions are also given on how to adapt the curriculum to better suit these learners and on how institutes and governments can live up to their ethical responsibilities and provide equal opportunities for refugee-background students.

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Chapter 1 – The Journey Begins

Under moonlight
An unknown route
A sky the colour of intense anxiety.[1]
Behrouz Boochani

Boochani's words above evoke a sense of the journey a refugee must take before arriving in a new land. It is a journey that few of us can imagine – with many experiencing insecurity, fear and trauma from years of war or persecution, followed by time spent in refugee camps or in forms of temporary accommodation in the period between being forced to leave their home country and that of arriving in their new country. Yet, once they arrive in their countries of resettlement, the journey is far from over. Refugees often need to learn a new language, a new culture and build new lives. For many, this means having to gain new skills and qualifications – usually by studying in Western tertiary institutes.

"We're setting them up to fail" (Harris & Marlowe, 2011, p. 189). This comment, made by staff members at an Australian university, demonstrated concern about the lack of specifically-targeted support for refugee-background students[2] who arrive without the necessary skills for academic study in Western tertiary settings. Unfortunately, these were not lone voices – an increasing number of studies (e.g. Baker et al., 2018b; Hannah, 1999; Kong et al., 2016) reveal a similar concern from staff and students in tertiary institutes around the world.

Even entering tertiary education is a struggle with only 3% of the world's refugee population making it that far (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019b). Although this has increased from 1% over the past few years, information about the

[1] Boochani (2018, p. 1)
[2] In New Zealand, refugees become permanent residents on arrival and from that point on are referred to as former refugees. Once they enter study, former refugees are usually referred to as refugee-background students. These two terms will be used in this manner throughout this paper.

success of those who do manage to study at a tertiary level is limited due to a lack of official statistics (Sladek & King, 2016). Nevertheless, qualitative research suggests that refugee-background students face a variety of challenges, including dealing with academic language, sociocultural factors, lack of finances and systems of support (Earnest et al., 2010; Mupenzi, 2018; O'Rourke, 2011).

As an ESOL teacher, this thesis journey began when I first started teaching English to refugee-background students at Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin, New Zealand. The students I taught had dreams of an education that would allow them to find good jobs, build new lives, and support their families while contributing to their new country. Yet, with the exception of a small handful, one by one they started dropping out of their mainstream courses. As I saw their dreams disintegrate, I realised that I – and the education system I was part of – had not adequately prepared them for the path ahead, and I knew that I had to start looking into ways of supporting them to get the education they deserved; an education that as a white middle-class New Zealander, I had taken for granted.

Despite a growing call for institutional and governmental support in order to provide a more equitable chance of success (e.g. Hannah, 1999; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Joe et al., 2011), little seemed to be changing and I was not prepared to wait any longer; instead I saw the need to investigate what I could do to better prepare my students for the challenges that lay ahead. As I contemplated this as a thesis topic, I realised I would be going on a journey with them, exploring ways to help them succeed. This led me to consider the importance of journeys in the lives of refugee-background students, and so I decided to use the journey as a metaphor to reflect the learning pathways that both I, as an ESOL teacher in a New Zealand polytechnic[3], and my students would take.

[3] A polytechnic is a skills-based educational institution similar to community colleges or Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions in Australia.

To start this journey, I needed to look at the paths that had already been taken by researchers around the world. Chapter 2 – Looking Back to Look Forward – examines the literature to date. It reveals that while there is an increasing body of research focusing on refugee-background students in tertiary education, there is very little exploring the experiences of adult students entering from English language classes, particularly viewed from a critical perspective. Previous studies – the majority of which have been located within university settings – have considered the types of support that are important for refugee-background students to succeed in tertiary studies (e.g. Earnest et al., 2010; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Mupenzi, 2018). Other studies have investigated how courses can be set up to prepare these students (Baker et al., 2018a; Silburn et al., 2010). This paper looks into ways English language teachers can best support refugee-background students, regardless of the type of English language course they teach.

As I witnessed my students finishing one journey and starting another on entirely new terrain, I realised something was missing – a guide. I recognised this as a role ESOL teachers could take on, particularly as we – in a sense – are gatekeepers to a new culture and often a new form of education too. However, I also realised that discovering how to do this was not a journey I could take alone, so I enlisted the help of some refugee-background students to walk alongside, in an attempt to make the road ahead easier for those who would follow in our footsteps.

Chapter 3 – How Shall We Travel? – introduces the research question and the methodology chosen to answer it. As a result of gaps in the research, the question I wanted answered was: In what ways can ESOL teachers best support the successful transition of refugee-background students from English language classes into mainstream tertiary studies? This chapter looks at ways of answering this question by first examining the three key components of research – worldview, design and methodology (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Using the transformative paradigm, with its emphasis on empowerment, social justice, and

respect for cultural norms, I decided to enlist students for two focus groups and an action research project, with the hope that through these we could find out if their expectations matched reality. In addition, together we would explore different ideas and activities to incorporate into the English language curriculum. Taking a critical perspective and using a collaborative approach, we would look into teaching and learning methods, the curriculum, and institutional and governmental responsibilities to come up with recommendations and solutions to help deal with some of the issues these students face, such as the lack of targeted support and language difficulties.

Chapter 4 – Mapping Out the Journey – introduces the participants who walk alongside me on this journey – one male and four female refugee-background students from the Middle East and ranging in age from 20 to 41 years old. In our first focus group, the participants share their backgrounds, including their educational experiences and the strengths they bring with them to their studies. We also discuss their expectations as they move into mainstream tertiary education. Chapters 4 and 5 are focused on the findings and therefore references are only included to enhance clarity.

Chapter 5 – Preparing for the Journey – describes how the information from the first focus group is used to form the base of an action research project, aimed at establishing whether the participants' expectations of tertiary study aligned with the reality of it. This 10-session preparation programme would also give us the opportunity to look at activities that could be incorporated into ESOL classes. During these sessions, we use a collaborative approach to consider strategies that can help refugee-background students deal with challenges they may encounter during their studies. As a teacher, I critically reflect on my teaching beliefs and practices to see how they could be amended to better suit this cohort of students.

Chapter 6 – Making the Way Easier – is based on our second focus group meeting. It explores our thoughts, as an ESOL teacher and refugee-background students, on the present

action research project. As well as discussing the elements of the programme that were helpful for the students, we reflect on other activities and ways of teaching that could be incorporated into ESOL classes to better prepare students for the next part of their learning journey. The findings in this chapter and in Chapter 7 are discussed in relation to the literature in this area.

Chapter 7 – Where to From Here? – looks at refugee-background students in tertiary education through a critical pedagogical lens. In this chapter, I examine my own teaching practice, and the participants and I discuss ways the curriculum could be changed to more readily reflect their needs. Using a combination of the students' ideas and research that has been undertaken in this area, I take a deeper look into the role and responsibilities of tertiary institutes and the Government in giving refugee-background students an equal opportunity of success as any other student entering mainstream tertiary studies.

In Chapter 8, I introduce The COMPASS Model – a tool I designed as a result of this study to guide ESOL teachers when working with refugee-background students transitioning to mainstream tertiary studies. Using this model, teachers are encouraged to apply principles of Collaboration, Orientation, Multiple literacies, Personalised learning, Advocacy, Strategising, and Self-care in order to provide support to their refugee-background students. This chapter finishes with a note on the importance of compassionate teaching.

Finally, in Chapter 9 – One Journey Ends – we look back on the paths we have taken on our journey so far and conclude with thoughts on the importance of this topic and ways to deal with the inequality that currently exists.

And so the journey begins…

Chapter 2 – Looking Back to Look Forward

Others have been here before me, and I walk in their footsteps.[4]

Elie Wiesel

The introductory chapter looked at the challenges refugee-background students face as they enter tertiary education in their countries of resettlement. Our journey to find ways to better support these students starts here by exploring the research that has already been carried out in this area. The first part of this literature review will give some background about the transition into tertiary education[5], the challenges that refugee-background students face during this time, and the preparation required to help them succeed. The second part will focus more specifically on research into the pathway between ESOL classes and tertiary settings. The third and final part will look at the use and importance of critical pedagogy by ESOL teachers working with refugee-background students.

Refugee-background Students in Tertiary Education

The tertiary education of refugee-background students offers hope for the future – not just personal hope but the hope that the skills and knowledge they gain can be used to promote peace and help create solutions for the current refugee crisis (UNHCR, 2019a). Yet, regardless of this and the many other advantages of having refugee-background students participating in tertiary education, a great number of unique challenges mean that this group of students begin their education in their country of settlement with significant barriers to success.

Determining where and in which ways refugee-background students are succeeding in tertiary education, as well as the specific challenges they may be facing, is problematic without adequate information – both statistical and narrative. Despite the need for this information,

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[4] Wiesel (1992)

[5] In the form of universities, polytechnics or other training institutes.

sourcing statistics on refugee-background students is an ongoing challenge. In New Zealand, refugees become permanent residents on arrival and as such are considered domestic students when they enter the education system (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2018). While residency may give them a sense of security in their new country, the designation of *domestic student* means that most institutions have little or no information on the educational needs and outcomes of tertiary refugee-background students. When statistics are unavailable, it becomes significantly more difficult to identify and implement the support required.

A similar situation exists in other English-speaking nations. Lenette (2016) points out that the lack of statistical information on refugee-background students in tertiary education in Australia is an issue of concern. She calls for a greater commitment from universities to support these students, as well as more research into the issues that refugee-background students encounter during their studies, and the support needed to help them persevere. She argues that universities have "a moral obligation" (p. 1312) to help refugee students succeed, as well as "a socioeconomic impetus" (p. 1313) in that the success of these students enables them to contribute to the society in which they live. Likewise, in Canada, refugee-background students are often categorised as *foreign-born* or *immigrants*, which not only creates statistical problems, but also neglects their complex set of needs, resulting in what Shakya et al. (2012) describe as "contradictory policy and social outcomes that are humanitarian without being socially just, equitable and empowering" (p. 73).

Equity in Education

An understanding and acknowledgement of the concept of equity and the difference between this and equality is essential if refugee-background students are to succeed in their tertiary studies. According to the online *Glossary of Educational Reform*, educational equity is related to fairness and "inequities occur when biased or unfair policies, programs, practices, or situations contribute to a lack of equality in educational performance, results, and outcomes" (Great Schools Partnership, 2016, para. 2). In a discussion document written to advocate for

additional support to be given to refugee-background students in tertiary institutes in New Zealand, Joe et al. (2011) define equity as "Principles and practices that ensure fairness to tertiary students irrespective of gender, race, religion, and disability, by providing opportunities to participate in and successfully complete tertiary studies. This includes taking measures to remove barriers to participation and achievement among those who are disadvantaged and/or under-represented" (p. 2).

Over the past few years, several New Zealand tertiary institutes, including the University of Auckland and Victoria University of Wellington, have listed refugee-background students as an equity group[6], despite no governmental requirement to do so. This status entitles those within the group to additional support aimed at helping them participate in and achieve at a tertiary level. It also allows statistics to be gathered that can indicate whether they are succeeding despite barriers. This information can help determine the types and level of support needed, including forms of institutional and governmental support. However, given the current lack of statistical information, much of that which is known about the experiences of refugee-background students' transition into tertiary education is in narrative form and therefore it is to this that we turn for guidance.

Factors Influencing the Transition into Tertiary Education

Before looking specifically at the experiences of refugee-background students, it is helpful to examine the wider context. The transition to tertiary education is challenging for students from all backgrounds, with research indicating that many students leave their courses in the early stages of their studies, generally within the first year (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018). One reason for this is the discrepancy between expectations and reality. Two Irish studies found that first-year students often have an unrealistic view of the work required and subsequent time commitment needed (Byrne & Flood, 2005; Cook and Leckey, 1999). In a more recent study of first-year students at an Australian university, Crisp et al. (2009) found

[6] In addition to the existing equity groups of Māori, Pacifica, and students with disabilities.

considerable variations in the students' estimates of the amount of independent study they would need to do and their ability to balance work and study. The researchers in all three studies pointed out that universities needed to take more responsibility in communicating with students to ensure that their academic expectations and the reality they would encounter were more aligned.

Understanding how much time and work is required in terms of independent study is particularly challenging for refugee-background students who may have experienced vastly different types of teaching and learning before their resettlement. In a study of refugee-background students from eight nations, Joyce et al. (2010) found that university was "a culturally alienating place" (p. 94) and that adapting to a culture of self-directed learning was particularly difficult. In the words of a Somalian male undergraduate:

> You have to be an independent person, you can't rely on teachers to tell you or for anything so, basically you have to be an individual, and independent and responsible, so far that's with [*sic*] I know, but so far I haven't really learnt it. (p. 89)

This lack of the knowledge and experience needed in a Western tertiary setting can cause a variety of problems for students from other cultures who may have to learn new study skills, such as dealing with different assessment types, academic writing and time management (Joyce et al., 2010), as well as learning to think critically rather than simply accepting the knowledge given by teaching staff (Chang et al., 2010).

Having sufficient English language skills to deal with course requirements, as well as to communicate with staff and other students, is a further major challenge. Despite meeting the English language entry criteria, many refugee-background students report that language is a significant barrier to success (Kong et al., 2016). The problems associated with language include coping with the amount of course reading and subject-specific vocabulary (Hirano, 2014; O'Rourke, 2011), which can be particularly difficult for those who have not had adequate exposure to printed text during their childhood (Stanovich, 1986). Academic writing is another

area of difficulty for refugee-background students, as is learning to deal with the various forms of language needed to function socially and academically (Kong et al., 2016). While there is a paucity of research into the time taken to learn a new language, Collier (1989) estimated that it takes between five and seven years for migrant adolescents to gain enough academic language to function at a level close to that of a native speaker.

For many refugee-background students, these issues are compounded by other difficulties, such as adapting to new technology (e.g. Ben-Moshe et al., 2008; Kong et al., 2016), finding the right course and career advice (Ben-Moshe et al., 2008), lacking support and understanding from lecturers and support services (Baker et al., 2018b), and having to juggle numerous external priorities and manage finances (Silburn et al., 2010).

In a New Zealand context, O'Rourke (2011) found that the key issues were "weak academic English, coupled with good spoken English; lack of cultural and social capital appropriate to tertiary study in New Zealand; trust and safety issues rooted in refugee experience trauma; [and] lack of a sense of belonging" (p. 28). It is important to note here that as O'Rourke's is one of the few New Zealand papers exploring the experiences of refugee-background students in tertiary studies, research from Australia – New Zealand's nearest neighbour – will form the core of this literature review.

Sourcing the Necessary Support

Accessing support to help deal with these issues is one of the main difficulties for refugee-background students. At an Australian regional university, students expressed frustration with having to use online systems to find information and support, as well as with the limited amount of time they were given for academic support sessions (Baker et al., 2018b). In a needs analysis across two Australian universities, Silburn et al. (2010) found that students felt inadequately prepared for their studies and called for ongoing, one-to-one support, particularly during their first year. Nevertheless, it is not just the students that recognise problems inherent in the support systems currently available in Western tertiary

settings. Harris and Marlowe (2011) interviewed staff members at another Australian university and found that "the phrase 'we're setting them up to fail' was frequently repeated throughout the staff interviews" (p. 189). The staff claimed that the university had not set up appropriately targeted support systems to help the refugee-background students with academic and English language issues. Yet, even when support services are available, they are not always used. Students from collective cultures are more likely to avoid seeking help for individual issues (Kong et al., 2016), as are those who have had negative experiences associated with asking for help in a Western tertiary setting and those with trust issues resulting from their experiences as refugees (O'Rourke, 2011).

Preparation for the Transition to Tertiary Studies

One way of reducing the educational difficulties faced during the early stages of higher education is through advance knowledge of what may lie ahead (Cook & Leckey, 1999). In a study of high school students entering university in Australia, McPhail et al. (2009) observed that orientation workshops and preparation programmes increased students' awareness of the need for independent learning and the time commitment required, as well as helped students to align expectations with reality. Through practice lectures, tutorials, assessments, and information sessions, the students gained confidence in understanding the tertiary environment and navigating the system. The programme also helped them understand course options and subsequent career outcomes, as well as enabled them to develop relationships with academic staff. Kong et al. (2016) suggested that such orientations could be of benefit to refugee-background students if they were specifically targeted towards them. These researchers also claimed there was a need for cross-cultural awareness training for educators, more research into the experiences of students transitioning into tertiary education, and better preparation by tertiary institutes in order to support students from refugee backgrounds.

Despite the previous arguments, Harris and Marlowe (2011) emphasised that simply providing orientations was not a solution and a more critical look at tertiary education in a globalised world was necessary to ensure that all students were being catered for rather than just those from the dominant culture. This call for a closer look at equality and justice within Western education systems was echoed by Mangan and Winter (2017) who conducted a meta-ethnography of 10 studies on refugee-background students in higher education in Australia, the United Kingdom and Malta. They found a number of systemic issues that led to students feeling that their experiences – both as refugees and as students – were not being recognised, which frequently resulted in a sense of ostracism. These researchers put out a call for more training for staff working with refugee-background students, institutions to look critically at whether their policies and practices promote equality and equity, and more qualitative research that includes the perspectives of educators of refugee-background students.

Given Mangan and Winter's call for more support and recognition of the challenges faced by refugee-background students, an important question to ask is what forms of support are most helpful. In a study at a regional Australian university, Baker et al. (2018b) found that students from a refugee background were much more likely to seek support from informal networks, such as friends, family, or trusted staff who had knowledge of their personal and social backgrounds than they were from their lecturers or generalised support services. The researchers asserted that trusted staff members, such as English language teachers, should be encouraged to build on their relationships with refugee-background students and given more training and institutional support in order to be part of a dedicated support network. The importance of trust was also emphasised by Woods (2009) who argued that refugee-background students need emotional support embedded within the academic support they receive so that they can connect more closely with their studies and with their institution. While this call for more support focused on youth, the same recommendations could prove fruitful for more mature students as well.

The Transition from ESOL to Mainstream Tertiary Education

While a growing number of studies are exploring refugee-background students' transition into tertiary education, the majority of these to date have focused on young refugee-background students, many of whom have studied in the secondary education system in their new country (e.g. Naidoo, 2015; Shakya et al., 2012). While valuable in itself, this research falls short of addressing the needs of the many older refugees who must train for a new occupation, update their qualifications or retrain in order to gain employment. Given that more than half of the refugees settling in New Zealand over the past decade have been 18 years or older (Immigration New Zealand, 2018), this is an important transition to consider. In New Zealand, the majority of these former refugees enrol in English language classes for up to 25 hours per week. In this sense, the English language classroom is a gateway between two cultures and in order to help bridge the cultures, ESOL teachers must be aware of the backgrounds of their students and the knowledge they already hold (Soto-Hinman & Hetzel, 2009), as well as the challenges they may be experiencing.

In a report looking into the experiences of refugee-background students transitioning between ESOL classes at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institute in Australia and mainstream tertiary education, Fagan et al. (2018) found that pathways were complicated by a mix of factors, including not only age, family responsibilities, aspirations, and support systems, but also discrepancies between cultural expectations. The researchers recommended that existing transition courses be adapted to more specifically meet the needs of refugee-background students by including such aspects as "academic, personal and interpersonal practices and expectations" (p. 32). While pointing out the importance of the trusted relationships that are often formed between English teachers and their students, Fagan et al. emphasised a need for teachers to have professional development to increase their understanding of equity in educational institutions and allow them to consider ways of achieving this.

Addressing many of the concerns raised in the report compiled by Fagan and colleagues, Baker et al. (2018a) designed a programme to help with the transition of refugee-background students into mainstream tertiary studies. One of the goals of this programme was to "purposefully and explicitly unpack the cultural expectations and linguistic requirements of higher educational study" (p. 64). By having a greater focus on academic language and by including authentic tasks, such as setting up online accounts, visiting the library, using schedules to plan time, and attending lectures, these sessions not only offered practical assistance to the students involved, but also helped them feel more confident about their tertiary studies. However, despite the success of the programme, the students voiced a desire for more personalised learning. As one student said, ". . . if I'm going to study in the future Engineering, why should I do Biology Lab?" (p. 73). This concern was acknowledged by the ESOL teachers who felt that catering to individual needs would be more beneficial, but that designing activities for specific disciplines was a challenge.

The need for more relevant language teaching has been pointed out by other researchers. A concern over the use of global English language textbooks was voiced by Wallace (2006) and Hayward (2007) who felt that the content did not reflect the lives of former refugees. While not specifically addressing refugee-background students, Marr and English (2019) emphasised that ESOL students would be more invested in learning if the course content was valid, authentic and relevant.

In the field of TESOL peace and conflict studies[7], Nelson and Appleby (2015) investigated how well prepared English language teachers were to teach students from areas of extreme conflict. They claimed that the majority of teachers did not have sufficient training to deal with issues that may occur in classes with these students. This point was also stressed by Hayward (2007), who felt that educators needed trauma training to gain an understanding of the impact of trauma and to learn how to respond appropriately to issues that may arise in

[7] This term was coined by Nelson and Appleby.

the classroom. This is a particularly pertinent call given that refugee-background students have an increased risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Steel et al., 2009), which can result in emotional and/or cognitive effects that can impede language learning (Joyce et al., 2010; Mangan & Winter, 2017; Söndergaard and Theorell, 2004). In addition to training and knowledge of the trauma-related factors that impact on learning, Nelson and Appleby highlighted the need for participatory classrooms where students could have a say on the course objectives, contribute to the curriculum, and take part in critical discourse on world affairs. They also called for more research into the views of refugee-background students about their experiences learning English.

Sharing Knowledge in the Classroom

> I used to tell my teacher "we have some other things we need to give to you – you need to consider our background, our culture – it may help you know how to handle different persons" (Burundi student, Onsando & Billett, 2009, p. 7).

This student's view, that teachers did not understand or appreciate their students' backgrounds, was shared by other African students interviewed by Onsando and Billett at a TAFE institute in Australia. These refugee-background students felt that teachers and other students needed to be more aware of the life experiences, educational background, and sociocultural differences that made it hard for refugee-background students to relate to others and to learn in a Western educational environment. The researchers suggested some form of bridging between the students' existing knowledge and the knowledge required for tertiary studies to help them feel more included. One recommendation was to pair refugee-background students with peer mentors from similar backgrounds who could help both students and teachers understand cultural differences. In a New Zealand context, Joe et al. (2011) suggested that student buddies or mentors be used to help refugee-background students understand the systems and support available in tertiary settings. The importance of developing social networks such as these to accommodate and respond positively to cultural

differences was also emphasised by O'Rourke (2011), who stated that not only was it needed to help refugee-background students succeed in their studies but also to help them integrate into their new community.

While acknowledging the difficulties that refugee-background students face, it is also important to consider the knowledge, experience, and characteristics that they bring to their studies (Hayward, 2019). O'Rourke (2011) pointed out that while there is great diversity in the refugee-background student population in any country, they tend to share valuable characteristics, such as resilience, curiosity, and motivation to succeed. Traits such as these can mean the difference between success and failure. In a study of graduates from a community college in the United States, Martin et al. (2014) found that those most likely to graduate from their course had clearly established goals, the motivation and determination to succeed, and the ability to deal with demands outside the study environment. In addition to positive characteristics such as these, refugee-background students bring with them a wealth of experience from their lives before resettlement – both from their everyday lives prior to leaving their country and from the refugee journeys they have made since that time.

The knowledge and experience refugee-background students bring to their studies can not only help them succeed academically (Lenette & Ingamells, 2013), but also contribute on a much larger scale. In an increasingly globalised world, it is essential that other perspectives and ways of *doing* and *being* are considered and incorporated within each society. Indeed, the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2014) lists *Growing International Linkages* as one of six priorities in its Tertiary Education Strategy [2014-2019], which includes the benefits of shared knowledge and increased cultural understanding. In order to do this, there must be more recognition of the need for Western education systems to adapt to the different learning styles and understandings of learners who come from non-Western cultures. Lenette and Ingamells asserted that a number of factors need to change within educational institutions that cater for refugee-background students, including classroom dynamics, styles of teaching and learning,

and the curriculum. They also emphasised the value of small research projects in adding new literature to current knowledge: “Perhaps these small projects, and the literature we produce from them, are a way of keeping a light burning until the pendulum swings in favour of a more expansive adult education system and a more sophisticated understanding of equity” (p. 77).

The Need for Sociocultural Capital

In order to fully understand equity, it is necessary to consider the sociocultural differences that can impact on success. In a recent literature review on student transitions into higher education, Donnell et al. (2016) found that many researchers drew on Bourdieu’s work on cultural capital (1986) in pointing out the inequities that eventuate when members of one group enter the world of another without the same sociocultural capital. While their research did not focus on refugees, Donnell et al. concluded that “Institutions and their students must come together and recognise their respective roles in transition, and institutional identities, as well as student identities, should shift to accommodate and support these processes of development and change” (p. 19).

Yet, changes in governmental and institutional policies that reflect the inequalities that exist generally occur slowly and waiting for this change is not always in the best interests of the students. Kramer and Bala (2004) looked into coping strategies of refugees in Western countries and found that helplessness can develop in those who believe that their future fate lies in the hands of authorities. While their research focused on asylum seekers, they suggested that any refugees in unsettling situations need flexibility to handle challenges they may encounter in a new context and argued that this could be achieved by giving them the opportunity to consider various ways of solving problems, setting goals, finding strategies to achieve their goals, and then changing those strategies as necessary.

The Importance of Critical Pedagogy in ESOL Classes

Most of the aforementioned literature alludes to a need for educators and organisations to reconsider how they provide education in increasingly multicultural

communities. Silburn et al. (2010) called for teachers to include international perspectives in the curriculum, provide speakers from similar backgrounds to the students, and be aware of the knowledge and skills that refugee-background students bring to their studies.

However, it is not simply a matter of adapting the curriculum to suit. In his well-known book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1970) stipulated that an acknowledgement and understanding of empowerment is essential, especially when working with those who may have lost power through authoritarian leaderships and displacement. Freire recommended empowering students by using what he termed as a problem-posing (liberatory) method of education in which students are given the opportunity to find solutions to their own problems. This form of pedagogy transforms the role of teacher and student into the new relationships of teacher-student and student-teacher who work collaboratively. This is similar to the Māori[8] concept of *ako*, another dialogic method which, the Ministry of Education (2013) describes, using ideas explained by Pere (1982), as an inclusive practice where shared teaching and learning experiences take place resulting in new knowledge and understanding. This method of teaching and learning avoids what Freire called the "banking concept of education" (p. 72) in which the students are simply vessels to be filled with knowledge by the teacher with no regard for the knowledge they already hold. Instead, using Freire's collaborative approach, knowledge is shared, and aspects of society are critiqued, challenged and changed in order to bring about a fairer, more socially equitable world. It could be argued that the use of critical pedagogy is particularly applicable in the education systems of Western countries struggling to adapt to an increasingly globalised world.

Yet, as Akbari (2008) pointed out, despite critical pedagogy being a topic of discussion in the field of ESOL for many years, these conversations had focused largely on the rationale of using it rather than on how to use it. In suggesting ways that critical pedagogy could be introduced into the English language classroom, Akbari emphasised the need to include the

[8] Māori are the indigenous people – the tangata whenua – of New Zealand.

students' own culture and choices, raise awareness of practices of marginalisation, and integrate students' real-world worries into the curriculum. While acknowledging that the area of critical pedagogy was contentious, Jeyaraj and Harland (2014) claimed there was considerable need for it within the area of English language teaching. In investigating its use by 13 ESOL teachers from eight countries, including New Zealand, they found that the majority had firm beliefs in the ability of critical pedagogy to lead to social change and justice. Most of the teachers in the study claimed that critical reflection of their own practice added to their sense of empowerment and helped them examine their own beliefs and assumptions. However, some of the teachers commented on the risks involved with being a critical pedagogist, particularly when working in repressive societies, and the emotional discomfort created by assessing their own beliefs, values and practices. The researchers suggested that more first-hand perspectives from teachers evaluating their own practice would be beneficial in order to better understand critical pedagogy in the real world and assess its long-term ability to transform those involved in its use.

Research on the use of critical pedagogy specifically with refugee-background students is sparse. In one of the few studies available, Couch (2017) used critical pedagogy when teaching adolescent health to refugees in a Thai-Burma refugee camp. She said that while it was challenging and at times overwhelming, it enabled collaboration and empowerment, and provided transformative experiences for all involved. In a New Zealand context, Hayward (2007) used a critical approach to assess the contents of the refugee resettlement programme at Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre, where all newly-arrived refugees spend six weeks[9] being orientated to New Zealand life. She emphasised that "it is desirable for refugee programmes to engage learners intellectually – programmes that do not merely transmit information – but that are designed such that they acknowledge and build on learner wisdom,

[9] This will be reduced to five weeks from 2020 due to the New Zealand Government raising its annual refugee quota from 1,000 to 1,500.

skills and abilities (regardless of the level of prior formal education)" (p. 11). While her research was targeted at orientation programmes, Hayward contended that critical pedagogy should be used alongside all ESOL programmes and all teachers of refugee-background students should be trained in how to use it.

Support for this argument comes from Hawkins and Norton (2009) who stated that language teachers were in the ideal position to address inequalities in the education system "both because of the particular learners they serve, many of whom are marginalized members of the wider community, and because of the subject matter they teach – language – which can itself serve to both empower and marginalize" (p. 32). These researchers pointed out that a lack of prescriptive information on critical pedagogy in the classroom meant that teachers had an opportunity to be creative when using it in their specific context.

In a particularly pertinent study, Mupenzi (2018) – a former refugee from Rwanda – interviewed other African refugees who had settled in Australia. He emphasised that these students needed to be considered more holistically with a recognition of all that they were able to add to the knowledge already in the classroom. Mupenzi pointed out that refugees had an inner resilience and their own cultural and linguistic capital that enabled them to come up with strategies to deal with challenges. He also called for more research into the perspectives of those who teach refugee-background students. Given that Borg (2009) voiced a concern that not enough ESOL teachers were actively involved in research, this highlights a need for more studies to be conducted in English language classrooms.

In short, despite a growing awareness of the many challenges faced by adult refugee-background students in tertiary education, this literature review reveals there has been little research conducted on their experiences of the transition to tertiary studies, and even less on ESOL teachers' involvement in this transition, particularly with a view to developing responsive teaching practices. Yet, there are many reasons why ESOL teachers can help with this transition into mainstream tertiary education. Firstly, they are more likely to have already

established the trust needed when teaching vulnerable students. Secondly, ESOL teachers and refugee-background students spend up to 25 hours per week together. This amount of time allows not just academic English content to be covered, but a variety of other important sociocultural issues, such as group work and interacting with teaching staff in a Western context, that may either be missed or covered very briefly in general tertiary orientation programmes. Thirdly, given their experience working with other cultures, ESOL teachers are the ideal guides, helping students transition between two worlds. With time, trust, sociocultural knowledge, and a critical perspective, ESOL teachers can facilitate a more equal relationship in the classroom, subsequently empowering their students to deal with the challenges they will inevitably face – both within their learning environment and in their everyday lives.

The literature review demonstrates that there are many ways that ESOL teachers can support their students, such as using authentic tasks orientating students to tertiary study, providing a greater focus on academic English personalised to the students' needs, and helping bridge the divide between students' expectations and the reality they encounter. The research suggests that a collaborative approach using Freire's problem-posing method of education may help students deal with challenges they face in the real world, as well as enable ESOL teachers to adjust their own practices to assist students transitioning to tertiary education. This approach also helps to recognise the strengths and capabilities that students bring to their studies that can help them persist even when confronted by challenges.

Chapter 3 details the next stage of the journey – finding ways to establish how ESOL teachers can best support refugee-background students on their journey into mainstream tertiary studies.

Chapter 3 – How Shall We Travel?

Blessed are those who see beautiful things in humble places

where other people see nothing.[10]

Camille Pissarro

Sitting within the transformative paradigm, which Mertens (2010) describes as "a framework of belief systems that directly engages members of culturally diverse groups with a focus on increased social justice" (p. 10), this study comprises a collaborative action research project and two focus groups sessions to explore the tertiary education expectations and experiences of adult refugee-background students in New Zealand and find ways for ESOL teachers to help facilitate their successful transition into mainstream tertiary studies. In addition to the research question, this chapter will look at the three key components of research – worldview, design and methodology (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018).

Research Question

Having examined the literature relating to the challenges faced by refugee-background students in tertiary education, it was apparent that the students needed more support during the transition period into further tertiary studies. As an ESOL teacher, I realised that I was in an ideal position to provide more than just language support, but I lacked adequate knowledge of the best ways to do this – both in terms of what I taught and how I taught it. As a result, the research question for this study became:

> In what ways can ESOL teachers best support the successful transition of refugee-background students from English language classes to mainstream tertiary studies?

[10] "Camille Pissarro quotes" (n.d.)

Worldview – Transformative Paradigm

Mertens (2007) states that no research should begin without the researcher laying out their assumptions. Therefore, it is important that I begin by sharing my ethical beliefs about the education of refugee-background students. As a white, middle-class New Zealand teacher, I am in a position of privilege that has resulted from being born in a country that offers me freedom, safety and the opportunity to make the most of the services that exist. I do not feel that this is a privilege offered to everyone who shares this country. I believe strongly that equality cannot exist without equity. Within this realm, I have concerns about my own practice, and how institutional and governmental regulations impact on this and the subsequent success of my students. I also believe that all those who are part of a system – in this case the education system – should be able to voice their opinions in a way that is both interactive and empowering (Mertens, 2009). These assumptions fit squarely within the transformative paradigm, with its emphasis on approaches to research that contribute to positive change. The transformative paradigm focuses on empowerment, social justice, and respect for cultural norms, attempting to address power imbalances and acts of oppression – issues that are particularly important when working with marginalised groups, such as refugees. The three principles that sit at the base of transformative research are respect, beneficence and social justice (Mertens, 2009).

Ethics and Values

Because the participants in this study were from a refugee background and were students in the institute where I work, a number of ethical issues needed to be considered. Given that trust is an essential ingredient of an action research project (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), I was fortunate to have previously taught and advocated for refugee-background students, including some of the participants, and had established the trust of many members of the local former refugee community. Nevertheless, in order to retain and build on that trust, it was important to outline to the participants the steps that had been taken through the

ethics process to ensure their protection in areas such as confidentiality, conflicts of interest, and cultural considerations.

Confidentiality

The issues surrounding confidentiality were discussed at the beginning of both focus groups. While I assured the participants that pseudonyms would be used instead of names, living in a small city with a relatively small former refugee population meant that I could not guarantee complete confidentiality. The consequences of this were discussed. I also emphasised that confidentiality included keeping their personal information safe. As such, I would transcribe the data personally and store it on a password-protected computer. The hardcopy consent forms would be stored in a locked cupboard until five years after the study, at which stage my supervisor would destroy them. On the consent forms and information sheets, participants were asked for their permission to use their words and stories in my Master of Educational Psychology thesis, which might then be published in journals and/or used at conferences to inform other ESOL teachers and their practice.

Another key consideration was potential harm to the participants. Because the participants are former refugees, I realised that they may feel some distress or discomfort when discussing their experiences and their settlement in a new country. In order to address any such responses, I met with a Middle Eastern support worker to pilot the questions for the first focus group. I also prepared an information sheet of the support services that Otago Polytechnic offered, including the Arabic-speaking support staff member, a healthcare centre, and a counselling service. Before the focus groups, I assured the participants that there was no obligation to answer any of the questions and that they could ask for the voice recorder to be turned off at any time.

Conflicts of Interest

In any research situation, there is the potential for power imbalances. This is particularly the case when the researcher has the dual role of the academic and the teacher –

both of which may be considered by participants to be the expert role. O'Leary (2014) recommends using action research to prevent a situation where the researcher is considered the expert and the participants are "passive recipients of scientific knowledge" (p. 167). Glesne and Peshkin (1992) also claim that action research is the preferred option in this situation but warn there are other issues involved with what they describe as research "in your own backyard" (p. 21), including the need to ensure privacy and protection. The students were assured that their participation in this project would have absolutely no effect on their grades nor would any information they shared be given to their lecturers. They were warned, however, that given the small size of the refugee population within their educational institute, their identities may be guessed[11]. Nevertheless, it was emphasised that staff were forbidden from discriminating against students based on any such information.

Cultural Considerations

As this research involved the participation of refugee-background students, there were many cultural considerations to be taken into account. For advice on this, I was able to work with a Middle Eastern friend who advised me on the issues I would need to consider from culturally-appropriate greetings to Middle Eastern values of privacy and confidentiality. It was essential that all steps were taken to ensure that participants felt that their cultural beliefs were recognised and respected. In addition, because the research was collaborative, the participants were encouraged to bring up any cultural concerns that might arise during the semester-long project.

After considering the aforementioned factors, this research was approved by Massey University's Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC) (see Appendix A) and by the Otago Polytechnic's Ethics Committee (see Appendix B).

[11] The participants had no concerns about their identities becoming known.

Design – Qualitative Research

The second part of the research approach involves selecting the research design (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Punch (2014) emphasises that choice of methodology should follow on from the research question in order to find the best fit between the two. As an understanding of the students' own experiences during their transition to mainstream tertiary studies is an integral component in finding the best ways to facilitate success, it is essential that the participants' narratives are given, rather than simply assumptions I make. In this respect, a qualitative approach seemed an obvious best fit given its usefulness in obtaining the perspectives of the participants in their own words (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). An additional advantage is that qualitative research can be conducted in a range of different ways, including through case study, ethnography, grounded theory, action research or a combination of these (Punch, 2014).

Methodology

The final step in ascertaining the research approach is determining the methodology that will be used. This section looks at the methods used in this study, including how the participants were selected, the context in which the study occurred, and the procedure followed to collect and analyse the words and stories of the participants.

Critical Action Research

As a teacher, action research held the most appeal of the various methods of qualitative research. The term *action research* was coined by Kurt Lewin as a way of using research to create social change (Lewin, 1946). Action research not only helps professionals improve their skills, but also provides a way of looking into issues in the real world and working with others to produce change (O'Leary, 2014). Greenwood and Levin (2006) describe action research as a way of building a "better, freer, fairer society through collaborative problem analysis and problem solving in context" (p. 3) while O'Leary adds that it has particular appeal in education given its ability to provide "a collaborative research approach that could

empower stakeholders to improve their own practice, circumstances and environments" (p. 167). Critical action research in education draws upon the theories of Freire (1970) in which a classroom becomes a venue for dialogue and problem posing with the intention of defining the problem, discussing the causes, and coming up with potential solutions.

Action research tends to take place in cycles involving acting, observing and reflecting, followed by revising and then repeating with appropriate changes. Arhar et al. (2001) describe this as a process that is messier than traditional research but one that helps to improve teacher practice through discussion, collaboration and enquiry. In the case of the present study, action research offered the potential to empower both the teacher and the students through trying new activities, reflecting on them, and changing them to better suit the multicultural classroom environment, as well as delving more deeply into the factors that can impact on the educational success of refugee-background students.

Participants and Context

As Dunedin had only recently become one of New Zealand's six refugee resettlement cities, a relatively small number of former refugees were going into tertiary education. Almost all of these students were studying at Otago Polytechnic[12] so a request for participants was made through the ESOL teachers, with the following requirements:

- Participants must be adult refugee-background students intending on studying mainstream subjects at Otago Polytechnic.
- Participants can be of any age, gender or nationality.
- Participants must not be progressing on to tertiary education directly from high school.

Those who met the criteria were given an information sheet (see Appendix C) to take home to discuss with their families, if they wished, and to decide if they would be interested in

[12] The participants all gave their permission for the institute to be named.

participating in the project. As a result of the recruitment process, five participants were selected for the study. The four females and one male were between 20 and 41 years old and were former refugees from Syria – although one had previously been a refugee from Iraq. They were all studying English at Otago Polytechnic. Three of the participants had left school at 14 years old while the other two had left school at 19 years old. All five had disrupted education which resulted in them being out of the education system for between five and 27 years. The setting for the project was Otago Polytechnic, a tertiary institute in Dunedin, New Zealand in which refugee-background students make up approximately 50% of English language learners.

Focus Groups

The first and third phases of the research involved the use of focus groups to understand the educational expectations and experiences of refugee-background students. Focus groups have been found to prompt discussion among members, leading to information that may not have arisen in individual interviews (Coolican, 2009). Kitzinger (1995) claims that "group processes can help people explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview." (p. 299). However, she also points out some of the factors that can lead to a reluctance to contribute, such as the need to conform to group norms and the possibility that if one group participant is doing well, others may not wish to share what they see as their own shortcomings. In order to counter such situations, the participants and I discussed ways to encourage and respect each other's perspectives, as well as the importance of doing so. We also discussed how we wanted to use the information gathered from the focus group to better facilitate tertiary success for refugee-background students.

For two reasons, the interview schedule was semi-structured (see Appendix D). Firstly, while the themes emerging from the literature were used to guide the discussion, this more informal structure allowed the participants the opportunity to take the conversation into areas

that I may not have anticipated. The other reason was that as a former journalist, I realised the importance of giving time and space for people's opinions, experiences and stories to come out. A voice recording was taken at each focus group and was transcribed onto a laptop computer immediately after each session.

Reflective Diary

Critical reflection was a key part of the process. Not only did reflecting critically on my practice enable me to contemplate and address my own beliefs, assumptions and positions of privilege and power, but it also allowed me to examine the other factors that impacted on my teaching and the students' learning. Mertens (2009) describes the increased self-awareness that results from reflexivity as "necessary for personal transformation and critical subjectivity" (p. 76). Furthermore, keeping a diary assisted in helping me avoid what Denzin (1994) describes as an "interpretive crisis" (p. 501) in which researchers impose their own interpretation on the data they collect. As part of the reflection process, I used a typology of reflective practice designed by Jay and Johnson (2002) who believe the three dimensions of descriptive, comparative, and critical reflection "represent a widening of the lens, from the situation at hand to multiple perspectives on a situation to an appreciation of the bigger picture of implications surrounding the problem at hand" (p.79). The guiding questions offered in this typology tool, such as "What is happening?" "What are alternative views about what is happening?" and "What are the implications of the matter when viewed from these alternatives perspectives?" (p. 77), provided scaffolding for my own reflection, as well as for the focus group sessions held with the participants.

Procedure

The project involved three phrases. In the first phase, participants took part in a focus group to discuss their experiences of education – both in the countries in which they have studied and in New Zealand – and their expectations of tertiary study. The process that would be followed during the focus group session was explained to the participants, who were then

given an assurance of confidentiality, as well as the opportunity to ask any questions about the project before being asked for their permission to proceed. They were also asked if they would like an interpreter present. However, they voiced confidence in their ability to discuss their experiences adequately in English and to help each other find the appropriate words when needed. The first focus group started with some general open-ended questions about the participants' study experiences in New Zealand to date (see Appendix D). The participants were then invited to talk about their expectations of future study experiences. After the participants had shared their thoughts, we discussed our understandings of the role of the ESOL teacher and the ESOL curriculum in facilitating the transition to tertiary studies.

The second phase of the project involved a collaborative learning approach in which I worked alongside the participants to investigate how ESOL teachers and the ESOL curriculum could best support refugee-background students moving into further tertiary education in New Zealand. To begin, we decided how the sessions would run, discussed the hoped-for outcomes of the semester-long project, and debated how the curriculum could be modified to fit this. Each session was based on the real-life needs of the learners, which were identified from the focus group and from the first two sessions, during which participants investigated whether their expectations met with reality.

Within the premise of critical thought playing a key role in empowerment, the participants and I worked together to consider possible ways for teachers to prepare students for the transition to mainstream. These suggestions were then incorporated into the curriculum and put into practice, with all participants reflecting on their inclusion. While the focus was on collaboration, the sessions required some degree of the authority that Freire (1995) stated in his later works was an inevitable part of being in a classroom. In line with Freire's recommendations, this position of authority was acknowledged from the outset and used to facilitate – rather than dominate – discussion, as well as to support students in skills development.

The final phase of the study involved a follow-up focus group in which the participants were invited to discuss their thoughts about participating in mainstream tertiary education. These included whether their expectations and the actual reality of study were closely aligned, any challenges they may have encountered that they did not expect, any comments on or changes they would make to the activities and teaching practices used during this project, and any other suggestions they had that might help them during the transition period.

After each focus group and session with the participants, I wrote a reflection – both in terms of the process and emerging themes in the research and my own pedagogy. I took additional notes on anything I thought had particular importance, such as cultural considerations and the wider sociocultural factors impacting on both my teaching practice and the participants' chances of success, as well as the potential impact that these had on communal well-being.

Thematic Analysis

The comments and reflections from the focus groups and diary entries were examined using thematic analysis to avoid my preconceived ideas influencing the thoughts of the refugee-background students. A concern often associated with this method is the lack of description given by researchers in how they come up with themes (Coolican, 2009). To avoid this, the data in this project was analysed using the semantic approach in which the text is examined for patterns, which are then reviewed throughout the process in order to see whether the themes need to be adjusted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After repeated readings of the transcripts, the themes that had been recognised were discussed with the participants to avoid any possible cultural misinterpretation, while still acknowledging the different realities from which we saw the situation.

This chapter provided an exploration of the research methodology used in this project. The data was sourced from two focus groups and a reflective diary of the action research process. These two sources enabled viewpoints of all those involved to be included. Because

this was collaborative research, the views and observations of both the participants and the researcher (also the teacher) were important. Thematic analysis was used to form the categories that determined the challenges and strategies considered most important by the participants and the researcher. The next chapter looks at the words and stories of the participants, which were shared during the first focus group.

Chapter 4 – Mapping Out the Journey

As you start to walk out on the way,

the way appears.[13]

Rumi

On any journey, it is necessary to contemplate not just where you are going, but what you need to do or learn to arrive there successfully, as well as the characteristics that can help on the way. That is essentially the aim of this chapter, which looks at the words[14] and experiences of five refugee-background students preparing for the move from English language classes to mainstream tertiary courses. As well as considering the backgrounds and strengths of the participants, this chapter will look at their expectations of mainstream tertiary study in a New Zealand setting.

A Journey Delayed

No matter how well we plan, sometimes our journeys are delayed due to unforeseen circumstances. Less than a week before the first focus group was to be held, a gunman killed 51 people in and around two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. This tragic event had a significant impact on the participants, all of whom were Muslim. Two of them travelled to Christchurch to assist families of the victims, while the other three took time off from study to support their own families and the local Muslim community. In class, tears flowed, and other refugee-background students expressed fear in a country where they had previously felt safe.

Over the next two weeks, the students' anxiety subsided as a result of widespread community support. Nevertheless, when the rescheduled focus group was held, the participants were still feeling tired and one participant acknowledged that their minds were not as clear as normal, making it difficult for them to answer some of the questions. They

[13] Rumi (n.d., as cited in Frankel, 2017, p. 15)

[14] The words of the participants have been used verbatim although additional words have occasionally been inserted within square brackets to aid comprehension.

were, however, keen to continue, hoping that anything they had to say would help other refugee-background students on their learning journeys.

Strengths for the Journey

Before arriving in New Zealand, former refugees have already completed a journey that few of us could imagine. From that journey through peace and war and from their lives before, they bring a wealth of knowledge, life experiences, skills and qualities that can help them as they prepare for the path ahead. During the first focus group, the participants recognised the following strengths in themselves: adaptability, life experience, and a love of challenges. They felt that drawing on these strengths had already helped them adapt to a new culture and could also help them fit more easily into a new educational context. As Rawan, a 20-year-old who had lived in three countries after leaving Syria, described: "I have many experiences because I have travelled to many countries. I have seen many people so that helps me." Her words were echoed by Niesha, who travelled with her family through four countries before arriving in New Zealand and felt that "because we've travelled to many countries, it's easy to adapt [to] the culture, so we just adapt [to] the culture quickly and we try to keep our culture, but we don't mind the differences."

The participants also demonstrated one of the attributes likely to help them persist in their studies – motivation (Martin et al., 2014). All five participants had been studying since arriving in New Zealand between two and three years earlier and felt strongly motivated to continue on the journey to mainstream studies. They listed many reasons for this, including the hope that they would be able to find an enjoyable well-paying job that would enable them to support their families and contribute to their new country. The group's only male Abdel expressed his desire to pay back the country that had resettled them: "Now we are a part of the New Zealand community or a big part of New Zealand, so we have to do something to support that. To say thank you. So that's what I'm looking forward to."

Being able to support family and friends who remained in her home country, being a role model to her children, and having the chance to be and do something else were the key motivators for Niesha, who considered herself ". . . lucky to be here so I have to work more and achieve more in order to help my own family, my own friends . . . if you're motivated to work, you study more and get your degree faster." She also pointed out that by learning new skills and getting good jobs, former refugees would be able to help refugees arriving in New Zealand in the future:

> I love one thing I heard in Mangere [Refugee Resettlement Centre][15]. One of the teachers, she said that we are happy to have you here, and everyone was like 'thank you for having us here' and she was like, 'No, don't thank us. Thank the other Syrians who started working and paying for tax in order to help more of you come here.' So, it's like what we are doing here, it's helping others too. It's helping the country itself and helping more people who are in need."

Acknowledging strengths that refugee-background students bring with them is important because these skills and traits can be used to help them succeed within a new education system (O'Rourke, 2011). Furthermore, a focus on strengths can counteract the Western tendency to use a deficit-based perspective in which former refugees are viewed primarily as trauma victims (Hayward, 2019).

Confidence in Completing the Journey

Despite acknowledging the strengths already gained on their journey and incentives to keep going, all five participants expressed a lack of confidence in their ability to complete further studies, giving themselves between 30% and 50% chance of succeeding. Contributing to this lack of confidence were the stories they had heard from other refugee-background students who had dropped out of mainstream programmes, most of them during their first

[15] Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre is where all new refugees to New Zealand spend six weeks on arrival to receive an orientation to their new country.

semester. Despite wanting to know more about tertiary studies in a Western context, Abdel tried to avoid listening to other students' experiences for fear their comments would make it harder for him to succeed. He summed up his feelings with this quote:

> Many of my friends they drop out, give up study. I try to be away. I don't want to listen to them because they say it's hard. I don't like to hear that because if I hear that and I start to think about that, I will find it hard, so I'm trying to give myself time to be more confident to complete study.

Other factors that the participants felt could affect their ability to complete their studies included course and career choice, learning and teaching styles, language skills, and time available for study. Similar concerns about their studies have been echoed by other refugee-background students already in mainstream tertiary studies (Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Mupenzi, 2018; Onsando & Billett, 2009). As noted by these researchers, it is important to be aware of the challenges that students are likely to face as they enter mainstream studies. In addition to helping guide research and developing support systems (Earnest et al., 2010), recognition of the challenges enables teachers and students to work together to come up with strategies to deal with any potential problems that may occur. Obstacles on the way do not have to mean the end of the journey, but they may either slow it down or require some lateral thinking in order to manoeuvre around them.

Destination – Course and Career Choice

On any journey, after determining the present position, the traveller must know which direction to go. The participants only had a vague destination in mind. Although they had each chosen an area of interest, they felt they needed to learn more about careers and courses in New Zealand, given that these were likely to be different from those in their home countries. Abdel suggested career guidance to help match their skills, interests and experience with appropriate occupations:

> I really don't know what I'm going to study and what is suiting me, where I can find myself in which subject. We need someone to explore our experience, our skills, and he will say it will be good for you, if you study this, and compare it with our answers so we can see. That will help.

Making career choices was a new experience for the three mature female participants. Although she was eager to have a career, Lena, a mother of five, pointed out that many women from her country had never previously considered job choice, as it was traditional for them to stay at home with their children and manage the household:

> It's difficult [to know what to do] because we didn't get any job before so our experience is we cook, we clean our house, we grow up our children but that's not our dream to do in the future. Because of that, we can't think what we are going to do.

The participants all felt that they needed help during their ESOL classes to determine whether they had decided on the right destination. The importance of choosing the right pathway was pointed out by Martin et al. (2014) who found that students attending community colleges were most likely to persist in their studies if they had clear goals in mind.

Learning and Teaching on the Way

In New Zealand, the traditional route to tertiary education is through a Western primary, intermediate and secondary school system and then into the tertiary sector – usually either a polytechnic or a university. The learning and teaching styles used within these tiers of the education system can vary significantly, creating difficulties for students who are unaware of the ways they will need to adapt, particularly during the transition from secondary to tertiary education, where more independent learning is required. As many refugee-background students have pointed out to me, for those who have not completed all or any of the levels within their own school system, beginning studies at a tertiary level in a different culture and language can feel like an insurmountable challenge.

None of the participants had experienced education at a tertiary level before arriving in New Zealand – two of them had completed high school while the other three had left school around the age of 14. For all but one of them, this meant a gap of between seven and 24 years since they had last studied in a formal learning environment. They worried that this time away from study would make it difficult to establish new study habits, particularly given the Western focus on literacy, as Abdel explained:

> Most of us, we left school for a few years. For myself, I left school for seven years and then my mind was just thinking about work and I came to here [so] after seven years I start studying. I just get my book to read or something. I sit with my book for five or ten minutes and then I can't because it's not something normal in my life, not something I really like, well, lived with. Students who are international [and those] who are from New Zealand, they lived with their books you know. They love reading and . . . because they study continuously, so if they start to read five minutes a day, they will increase it year after year after year so we have a big gap so that make it harder for us.

Without realising it, Abdel had identified *Matthew Effects*, a term used by Stanovich (1986) to explain differences in children's reading achievements. The term refers to a biblical passage in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer. Stanovich made the connection between the amount a child reads and their reading skills, with keen readers progressing more quickly than reluctant readers due to increased exposure to text, thus creating an ever-widening gap between the students' levels.

The participants felt this learning gap would be exacerbated by the different learning styles used in the Western and Middle Eastern education systems. They were already beginning to note many of the differences, including that during their schooling they had been taught *what* to learn but not *how* to learn – other than through rote memorisation. Niesha feared this had led to an inability to use critical thinking skills:

> We're just memorising, we just try to memorise it to pass the exam. We don't have to do researches. We don't have to think critically. It's like we have to memorise the book and then print it out on exam sheets.

Despite Niesha's dismissal of her previous learning style as "just memorising", it is important to acknowledge the benefits that different cultural styles can bring to the classroom. Chang et al. (2011) suggest that the memorisation skills typically used by Eastern learners in combination with Western-style problem-solving activities could promote more success than Western methods alone.

As well as learning styles, the participants had noticed differences in the Middle Eastern and Western teaching styles. They felt that the teachers they had in their home countries had been "strict" and "serious" while their teachers in New Zealand had been "easy-going", "friendly" and "more caring". Niesha described how she felt about her teachers' support, "I feel like my mum and dad are giving me advice, what to do, how to do it. It feels good. Like a family."

Nevertheless, they expressed concern that some of their ESOL teachers were too gentle with them, not always requiring them to do homework, which they felt would have a detrimental effect on their studies. Such a casual teaching approach was almost unheard of in their previous educational experiences where students were punished for not completing their homework. Despite recognising that their ESOL teachers acted with good intent and more leniency because of their refugee background, the participants believed a stricter approach would help them develop better study habits.

Learning the Language

Although they manage to function in English on an everyday basis, all five participants felt that language would be the main obstacle on their learning journey. Najila, a mother of three, suspected that understanding the language used in mainstream classes would be more difficult than understanding the content itself: "It's hard to continue studying after English.

Need time to be confident, to go to other study because other students tell us very hard connect with a student or teachers. The study easy but language hard."

All the participants pointed out that the time in which they were expected to become proficient in the language was much too short. Like most domestic students in New Zealand, refugee-background students are eligible to receive a student allowance for 200 weeks. Many of them use this to study English through the nationally-recognised New Zealand Certificate in English Language. Each course within this qualification lasts one semester, taking approximately three years for students to complete the first four levels[16]. If they do not progress through each course in the amount of time given, they are at risk of failing and losing their allowance the following semester. The participants felt that these requirements left them hurrying through their studies and as a result not developing the confidence they would need to progress, as Lena explained:

> Imagine that you go to a country with a new language. In two years and a half years, you won't be perfect so it should be a bit longer . . . to have more confidence about the language and then you can identify what would you like to study or enter the course that you interest in.

The rapid English spoken by New Zealanders was considered a significant barrier, as Najila described, "Yesterday I spoke with student in here and she spoke with me very, very quick. I can't understand from her everything. I understand main idea sometimes." Abdel felt that the extra step required when translating from one language to another would limit his ability to keep up with peers:

> I don't want myself to spend too much time to translate words while the others understand and start work and I am still doing translation. I need to be same as my

[16] The fifth level of the qualification is available at a limited number of institutes in New Zealand and is generally only required to access post-graduate studies.

> friends in class so once the teacher say something, I can understand it quickly and then I can start my work, so I don't have to take a long time to process the information.

Even though the participants had the desire to use and practise the language out of class time, most of them were reluctant to, and instead would spend time with others who spoke their first language. Recognising that one of the main barriers was a lack of confidence, Niesha shared that "usually we [Arabic-speaking students] stay together instead of meeting new friends and making new relationships", a situation also noted by Rawan, who added, "We don't practise. We don't speak with people." Without connections to others, it becomes more difficult for refugee-background students to establish a sense of belonging, and to gain the sociocultural knowledge needed to succeed in academic settings unlike those in their home countries (Onsando & Billett, 2009).

Making Time to Continue the Journey

Finding the time to study was another issue of concern for all five participants. Abdel pointed out that refugee-background students were not only studying but also trying to build a new life and support their families, and as a result, their studies were not considered their greatest priority. He described the dilemma that many refugee-background students face in their new country:

> There will be challenge for people who came as a refugee to New Zealand. The main reason is they came to here to accomplish their new lives so part of their thinking to build their family and houses, lives. Then the other part to focus on study.

Adding that further pressure is often put on those who can speak English and may be needed to take family members to appointments or help them with other English language-related tasks, Abdel listed many of his responsibilities as the best English speaker in the household:

> [I need to] take them [family members] to school, drop them off, teach them, support them, go to my part-time job, and then after all of that, I have to think about my study, about myself so I don't have that much time to support myself to be, to have a good

study you know. After all of that, my mind will be not focusing on study so how can I sit and study?

These comments about the difficulties involved in juggling priorities and managing time have been echoed by refugee-background students in other studies (e.g. Earnest et al, 2010; Silburn et al., 2010). This need to manage time often becomes more of a factor in Western tertiary education due to the increased focus on independent learning – a change in style that can create significant problems for students new to the practice (Joyce et al., 2010).

By looking at our current position and considering the road ahead, the participants and I were able to discuss their backgrounds and the strengths they brought with them that would help them continue on their journey – information that can also be used by ESOL teachers to guide them more proficiently. It was apparent at this stage that the participants had brought many strengths with them that would help them to learn in a new culture and they were motivated to continue. Yet, they also acknowledged that the challenges ahead would make the journey a difficult one.

Chapter 5 – Preparing for the Journey

Sometimes, reaching out and taking someone's hand is the beginning of a journey.

At other times, it is allowing another to take yours.[17]

Vera Nazarian

Every journey takes preparation. To begin this journey, I invited the five participants to attend 10 tertiary preparation sessions, which we would later use to discuss which activities or exercises could be incorporated into ESOL classes to best prepare refugee-background students for mainstream studies. The classes were held during independent learning time – a two-hour period once a week during which students can work on homework or assignments by themselves, but with a teacher present for assistance. Using a critical perspective, I reflected on the content and my teaching practice after each of the sessions[18]. Relevant student comments from the second focus group have been included in this section. A more in-depth discussion with reference to relevant literature will be presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

In order to find the most creative, culturally responsive ways of supporting both the teacher and the students, this project uses a collaborative approach based on Freire's problem-posing method of teaching, which encourages dialogue between teachers and students, and the use of critical thinking with the aim of empowering learners (Freire, 1970). It also incorporates the Māori concept of ako in which each learner is a teacher and each teacher is a learner (Ministry of Education, 2013).

Session 1: Challenges and Expectations

This session had two aims: the first was to brainstorm reasons why refugee-background students might drop out of their studies and the second was to establish what the students knew about their course and career choices. As I wrote in my reflective journal: *At*

[17] Nazarian (2010, p. 186)

[18] These reflections are italicised throughout this chapter.

the moment, there's a lot I don't know about my students' expectations and knowledge about further study. How can I prepare them if I don't know what they do know and what they don't? If we can identify expectations, we can then look at whether reality actually meets these expectations.

I asked the participants to write on the board all the challenges they could think of that might cause them to drop out. In addition to the previously identified challenges of choosing a suitable career path, learning the language, and dealing with cultural differences and time issues, they listed technological issues, fear of failing, and not having support. I later reflected on these: *I felt so overwhelmed looking at all the challenges, but at the same time I felt impressed that the students were determined to go on when there were so many barriers ahead. Would I be so strong in a different country and culture?*

The participants filled in forms about expectations of the tertiary courses they wanted to enter (see Appendix E). Only Abdel had any idea of how much the course would cost and the entry requirements while none of them knew the likelihood of getting jobs in their chosen field, how much time they would need to study or the types of assessments they would have to complete. Abdel voiced his concern that it was not the entry requirements that would be the greatest challenge but getting all the work completed, given English was not his first language. "I think doing homework online [will be a challenge]. If it takes two hours for others, it will take four for me."

The participants acknowledged that planning for these challenges and coming up with strategies could build their confidence, so we decided to spend the next few sessions seeking solutions to potential issues. Reflecting later on the success of the collaborative approach we used during this session, I noted that we could have started the session by identifying the students' strengths rather than simply launching into potential challenges.

Session 2: Time Management

Having already established the participants' expectations and knowledge of their future courses, this session focused on looking into the reality involved in studying at tertiary level in a Western context. Given that *time* had been named as an issue during the first session, I thought it would be helpful if this was the initial focus. Each of the participants filled in a weekly study schedule as if they were in their first semester of tertiary classes. In order to be able to complete the schedule accurately, they needed to find out how much time would realistically be required for their studies, and then work out how they could fit their other responsibilities around this.

All five participants were surprised to learn that a full-time course required approximately 35 hours of study a week, having estimated between four hours (of independent study in addition to class time) and 30 hours (including independent study) per week. Their completed schedules revealed that most of their time out of study was dedicated to their families.

It was easy to see that time management would be one of their major issues. As I reflected in my journal: *Not only were the students unsure of the time requirements of their course, but they also didn't factor in the additional time that they believed it would take them to read and understand the language. I have no idea how they will get everything done.*

Having seen their timetables, the participants also recognised that time management was a potential area of concern – particularly given the number of non-study commitments they already had to accommodate. Despite acknowledging the difficulty this would create, Abdel voiced hope that it would only be a temporary issue:

> I think it will challenge us in the beginning, but I think later we can start managing it or get used to it because we have a lot of responsibilities we have to do, and we will try our best to do that. The first time, I'm sure it will be hard for us.

Nevertheless, I felt concerned that their timetables left little room for flexibility: *Life is not predictable and inevitably unexpected issues will arise. I've noticed this happens a lot in ESOL classes and many of the students don't catch up on the work they have missed. Is further study realistic at this time? I can't make that decision for them but at least we can consider some ways to deal with the challenges ahead.*

Session 3: Problem Posing – Coming up with Strategies

This session involved the use of Freire's problem-posing method of education (1970). The participants were given some scenarios that they might encounter during their tertiary studies and were asked to consider strategies they could use to deal with them if they were to occur.

The scenarios were:

- It is one month until your new course starts. You want to prepare beforehand. What could you do?
- You have been on your new course for one month and you feel like you have too much to do. You are stressed. What could you do?
- You have just received 50% for an assignment. You think it is worth more. What could you do?
- You are working on a group assignment but the people in your group keep cancelling the meetings and you are not getting the work done. You are afraid that you will fail the assignment. What could you do?
- You can't understand your lecturer's English and you feel confused in class. What could you do?
- You have an assignment due on Friday (today is Monday). You are very worried about it and you are not sure you can finish it on time. What could you do?

The participants came up with a range of different strategies for the scenarios. With the exception of Niesha, who mostly sought to overcome problems herself, the participants felt

they would deal with the challenges by asking for help from their teacher or student support services.

Coming up with a strategy for each scenario was easy for the students, as I later reflected*: Life experiences were definitely a strength here as the students found it quite easy to come up with one or sometimes two practical solutions for each of the scenarios.* However, having only one or two solutions limits options, and given the differences between the Western education system and the Middle Eastern system in which they were educated, it seemed important to encourage them to gain other perspectives.

Session 4: Problem Posing – Interviewing Other Students for Their Strategies

In this follow-up session, the participants interviewed other students around the central campus area of the institute to find out how they would deal with the scenarios from the previous session. This part of the project also enabled us to discuss another issue that many refugee-background students have on entering classrooms with native English speakers – initiating conversation.

My hope was that if the participants could combine their ideas and strategies with those from local students, support staff and me, they would have a range of ways to deal with any issues that might arise during their studies, as I later reflected: *While the challenges that occur in the future may differ from those in the scenarios I gave them, I hope that by using critical thinking, the students will have a greater ability to see many different solutions and then choose the most suitable strategy based on the context.*

I knew the participants would have to step out of their comfort zones to approach other students, so beforehand we discussed some ways of initiating conversations. I later considered how this could have been a difficult exercise for many: *I know this exercise can be really hard. Even though I was born here, I find it difficult to start conversations with strangers and I think many other New Zealanders do too. It's even harder for people who don't speak English, but I worry if they don't make the first move, they'll find themselves quite isolated.*

The participants expressed feelings of happiness and greater confidence after returning from interviewing other students. They felt that being able to interact with local students in a scaffolded way – with set questions and a legitimate reason to start talking – had made the task easier. They reported back that the students they had approached had been friendly and welcoming, providing some strategies, such as seeking support from the Otago Polytechnic Student Association and asking for extensions when stressed, that they had not previously considered.

Nevertheless, I later reflected on a couple of flaws in my teaching approach: *The glow of a successful session faded rather rapidly when I realised that I had done exactly what I was trying to avoid – directing how the class went. I compiled all the scenarios for the students, rather than giving them the opportunity to think of scenarios based on any other challenges that they thought they may face. So much for collaboration! I also didn't think to discuss with them the ways they would normally start conversations in their culture, and I was surprised to learn later that many people in the Middle East start conversations by asking where people are going or whether they have eaten. How could I never have thought to ask my students about conversation starters before?*

Session 5: Course and Job Advice

The participants were asked to work independently in this session, using it to book a time and then meet with one of the polytechnic's careers advisors. The aim was for them to determine whether they were choosing the right course, as well as look into any other career and course options that may interest them.

Making this session self-directed was not entirely successful: *I'm not sure if giving students who have a lot of other priorities an independently-led session is such a great idea. Only one of the students sought advice about courses and she didn't find it particularly helpful, stating that she was given only the information that could be found on the institute's website. She felt she needed more than that to get a realistic idea of what the courses involved. When*

asking about what she could do for a job in the future, she was encouraged to 'Do what you love'. Though this may be a wonderful attitude to have, how does it work for students who have not had the same opportunities as other students, who are unaware of the long-term repercussions of their choices, and/or who do not know the choices available?

The reasons that the participants gave for not seeking course and career advice were that they were too busy; that they did not think the advice would help; and that they preferred to seek advice from other sources, such as their teacher, their friends, or their family.

That same week, I encouraged one participant to attend a polytechnic open day within her area of interest. Although I had considered it the ideal way for her to choose from the many courses available in that department, she did not attend, leaving me confused. Later, however, I contemplated something I had not previously considered*: It was only later when she mentioned feeling nervous about it that I considered that for a Muslim woman to go alone to an open day during the weekend and without any emotional or language assistance was a 'big ask' and that I should have looked at ways of supporting her. A lecturer within the mainstream recently said to me that she felt refugee-background students need a lot of hand-holding. I initially felt this was a somewhat negative comment, but then I reconsidered – don't we all need someone to hold our hand at times? Wouldn't I want someone with me if I was in another country with a language I struggled to understand, and different cultural norms and rules?*

Despite only Niesha meeting with the careers service, all five participants felt strongly that they needed more career guidance to help them identify their current skills and experience and learn about careers that might suit them. Abdel realised that there may be "dream jobs" that he did not know existed while Lena felt it would help them to learn the differences between jobs in New Zealand and those in their home countries:

> We don't know about [different jobs]. Maybe it differs between here and our country. For example, I will say that I have specific thing I am going to do but maybe I can't because it's difficult to get it in this country. We don't have any idea about that.

Session 6: Academic Vocabulary and Key Concepts in Tertiary Education

This session focused on academic vocabulary. The participants were given a gap-fill activity in which they needed to choose from vocabulary and terms commonly used in tertiary studies, such as *extension*, *lecture* and *tutorial*, and place them in sentences that explained how they were used.

The three participants who attended the session found the vocabulary activity useful and thought it would help them in their future studies, particularly as they had not encountered many of the words before. Seeing the gaps in their knowledge, I reflected: *Given the concerns the students have about their language level and the many facets involved in learning academic language, this session was just 'skimming the surface of the iceberg'. I realise now that we should have looked at cultural interpretations of these concepts, particularly given the different cultural views on such matters as how much published material can be copied and how much flexibility there is with due dates for assignments.*

Session 7: Academic Vocabulary and Briefing about Placements

We reviewed the vocabulary from the last session with a 'What's the Difference?' exercise (Marks, 2007), which required the participants to distinguish between academic terms like *a first draft* and *a final draft* and academic roles, such as *supervisor* and *administrator*. We also discussed expectations of the course placements that I had organised in which each participant would spend a day attending classes in the course of their choice.

The session was held at the end of an exam week and I had chosen the vocabulary activity as a result of how I was feeling at the time: *This week has been exhausting and I feel myself burning out. Supervising exams with stressed-out students, designing and moderating assessments, marking, meeting 1-to-1 with students . . . I don't feel I'm doing anything*

particularly well at the moment. I found a follow-up exercise, but I'm not prepared, and I feel like I'm letting my students down.

Although I had not felt it was the best use of the limited time we had together, reviewing vocabulary proved to be a useful exercise. A couple of participants had missed the previous session and were keen to learn new language while the others used the opportunity to share the information and ideas that they had previously learned about the new words, and to practise how the words could be used in context. Nevertheless, my reflection highlighted a couple of areas that could be improved: *I realised a little too late that I hadn't consulted the students on possible content they would like covered in this class. I also realised I didn't give them a chance to practise the language either through a role play or by compiling questions to ask other students. This session probably should have gone before the problem-posing sessions to give them the opportunity to repeat the vocabulary and to come up with strategies to deal with issues like plagiarism.*

Session 8: Placements

There was no session this week – instead participants attended the mainstream class of their choice for a half or whole day.

Organising the placements had been a particularly time-consuming exercise as I was not always sure who I needed to contact within each department and I quickly learned that lecturers do not always reply to emails. As I reflected, after having received responses from all the departments: *There was some concern about students joining classes so late in the semester, given the additional confusion that could be created by trying to pick up concepts other students had been studying all semester. I thought this was a fair point.*

Despite the ill-timed experience and the need to juggle the placements with the participants' many other commitments, four of them were able to attend at least one class in the subject of their choice. The fifth one – Lena, a busy mother – could not fit in time to attend around family appointments and assignments. After taking each participant to their

classes to introduce them to the lecturers, I reflected on the experience: *I think we all felt nervous when we entered the classrooms – in many ways I felt that I had as little idea about what to expect as they did. It really felt like a step that I should have taken earlier. I haven't been into a polytech class other than my own since I was a student at one 25 years ago and despite working at a polytech, I don't know what happens in mainstream classes anymore!*

Accompanying participants to their classes enabled me to see some of the challenges that refugee-background students faced that I had not previously considered. One of these was the gender ratio in classes. On accompanying one of the female participants to a computer-based course, we immediately noticed there was only one other female student, also a Muslim former refugee. In my reflection, I expressed my surprise: *I couldn't believe that there was only one female in the class! Even though the males were all friendly and welcoming, I know her well enough to realise she must feel uncomfortable. I should be walking in my students' shoes to really see what they're experiencing in their studies.*

Session 9: Guest Speakers – Cancelled

I had asked two refugee-background students in their first year of mainstream tertiary studies to speak to the group. However, the session had to be cancelled due to a student event for ESOL students organised by another department within the polytechnic.

Although I realised that the opportunity to mix with other local students was important, I felt disappointed to have to cancel a session that I thought would be particularly beneficial: *I would have loved the students to hear the stories of refugee-background students who are succeeding – and in some cases excelling – in their first year of studies. This would have been such a contrast to many of the stories they've heard so far and could increase confidence or at least give them some strategies to overcome challenges.*

I also felt that interruptions such as these had become commonplace and was worried that they were affecting my ability to teach – both during this project and in my usual classes – in a consistent way. Others included free driving lessons; self-defence lessons that had been

organised in response to the 2019 attacks at the Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand; family commitments – including leaving early to prepare for family birthdays; religious festivals; transport and parking issues; appointments with government agencies to deal with income and allowances; part-time jobs; and frequent health appointments for the students and their family members. My journal reflected my dilemma: *I know how important these are to my students and how inflexible many services can be when issuing appointments so I know I need to be patient and adaptable, but how can I do this and still properly prepare my students for their future studies in the limited amount of time they have to complete these before losing student allowances?* I later wondered why more real-life activities appropriate to the students' current situation were not included in the ESOL curriculum: *How can I bring more of my students' lives into our classroom? After all, this is how their lives are as they settle here – it is one thing after another and it's messy and nothing I do or say can change that. I should be teaching the English for these situations, not the stuff in their textbooks, where they read about American movies that they don't have time to see, celebrities they have never heard of, and endangered animals they will never encounter in real life.*

Session 10: Discussion about Placements

During our final session together, we discussed the classroom placements. The participants were pleased to have had the opportunity to join a class and felt that this was the most helpful of all our sessions. Niesha returned from her course having gained an entirely different perspective of what studying at polytechnic would require:

> [In this course] we don't have to do homework. They were like 'You can do all the work you have to do at the polytech while you study'. It's more a hands-on kind of study, rather than reading or memorising or writing. I love the way they teach it.

She was also pleased to find out there were opportunities to incorporate ideas from her own culture. This approach was one I hoped other courses also used: *I'm so relieved to hear that*

there are courses which enable students to share their culture and look at ways it can influence their future work. Imagine what an amazing place this would be if we truly learned from other cultures and were able to share our best practice, knowledge and skills. This was a Spark Joy *moment*[19]*.*

This chapter outlined the preparation sessions that were held to help support refugee-background students transitioning from ESOL into mainstream tertiary studies. My reflections as the sole teacher are interwoven with the words of participants who commented on their experiences during the second focus group. These will be discussed in more length in the following chapter.

[19] *Spark Joy* is a book written by Japanese woman Marie Kondo. Kondo uses ancient Japanese techniques to introduce ways of removing clutter and re-organising the household. Reading this book, I learned new techniques that made me rethink the way I had always organised my belongings and my life. This total change in my way of thinking made me more aware of cultural 'secrets' we could share.

Chapter 6 – Making the Way Easier

We teachers make the road,

others will make the journey.[20]

Victor Hugo

In order to see if the participants felt more prepared for the educational journey ahead, we met for a second focus group. Using the 10 sessions as a base for our discussion, our aim was to determine ways in which ESOL teachers could provide guidance and support to refugee-background students going into tertiary studies. The participants were later consulted on the main themes, which have been listed under key milestones of the journey: Attributes of the Guide and Guided; Establishing Bearings (Students' Backgrounds and Course and Career Choice), Orientation (to Systems and Styles), Preparation for the Journey (Cultural Considerations and Learning the Language), Dealing with Challenges (Time Management and Trauma). Two further themes that arose – Time and Support – will be discussed in the next chapter, as will specific recommendations.

Attributes of the Guide and the Guided

One of the roles of a guide is to prepare those he or she is guiding for the journey ahead. As a teacher of refugee-background students, I acknowledged that I was caught in the dilemma of trying to find a balance between showing a 'gentle' approach, given my students' backgrounds and the ongoing challenges they faced, or 'pushing' them to get through their studies. After the mosque shootings, the ESOL teachers at my institute had been encouraged to avoid putting any additional pressure on the students, advice that felt right. However, in normal situations, the participants requested that teachers be "strict" to give them the push they needed to complete their studies, particularly in regard to homework, which they felt

[20] Hugo (n.d., as cited in Gruwell, 2007, p. 29)

should be set regularly from the beginning of the course to help build up study skills and habits, such as studying independently.

Finding a balance between the two approaches to teaching can be difficult for ESOL teachers, who are also aware of the day-to-day pressures faced by many of their students and the knowledge that they have limited time in which to do their studies without losing their allowance and their access to free English classes. Despite their educational gaps, refugee-background students are expected to progress at a rate equivalent to that of students from other countries who have had much more exposure to the language, are in New Zealand for the sole purpose of studying, and do not have the same number of commitments outside the classroom.

Yet, despite a call for a "push" from their teachers, the participants felt strongly that they needed to take responsibility for their own journeys. As Niesha stated:

> I'm responsible to do the work and you're responsible to prepare me how to do it but I have to do the work, I have to study. What usually happens is that teachers are trying to teach us everything but when we are not studying at home, we're not working on ourselves.

Establishing Bearings

In order to orientate and prepare ourselves for the journey ahead, we needed to determine the knowledge and experience that the participants brought with them and the direction in which they wanted to travel.

Where We are Now (Students' Backgrounds)

We all felt that it was important for teachers – both ESOL and mainstream – to be aware of the skills, experiences and background of refugee-background students, including any educational gaps; an appreciation of the many responsibilities they have and challenges they face settling into a new country; and some knowledge of their culture. Noting the many differences between Western and Middle Eastern cultures, Lena pointed out that teachers

need to “just understand that our lives are different than yours”. The participants voiced the hope that with this knowledge, their teachers would be able to help them adapt to new learning styles and cultural habits, such as thinking critically and reading for enjoyment.

In order to help refugee-background students succeed in their studies, Silburn et al. (2010) pointed out the need for educators to know about their culture, life experiences, and language development. The ability to form a bridge between cultures is essential in the classroom, according to Soto-Hinman and Hetzel (2009) who wrote that “Caring teachers must know their students and build bridges into their students’ home cultures” (p. 155).

As well as recognising background knowledge, teachers need to establish what their students expect on their future learning pathways. Do their expectations reflect reality? None of the participants in this study were sure of what to expect when they entered mainstream tertiary classes. In addition to not knowing costs or entry requirements, they lacked knowledge of how the course would run in terms of how course material would be presented, the types of assignments they would be required to complete, and the amount of time that would be needed for their studies – both in class and out of it. Earnest et al. (2010) noted that there is often a mismatch between what refugee-background students expect in tertiary studies and the reality – a situation that leads to greater pressure on students and adds to the multiple other challenges that they face.

Where We Want to Go (Course and Career Choice)

All five participants felt strongly that getting more information about courses and possible careers should be a key component of ESOL courses. The four who visited classes felt that this experience was the most helpful of the sessions, not only because it offered them an insight into their chosen course, but also because it increased their confidence in succeeding in their future studies. Reflecting on his experience, Abdel commented that having the chance to see what happened in classes, talk to lecturers and meet other students had “removed a lot of worrying”. Attending classes can also help students ensure they have chosen the correct

course, given that some researchers (e.g. Earnest et al., 2010; Hannah, 1999) have found that being given incorrect or incomplete course advice had led to refugee-background students choosing inappropriate courses for them and subsequently increased the risk of them dropping out.

However, like some of the lecturers I had contacted to arrange the class visits, the participants believed these visits should occur earlier in the semester and more than once. They felt this would enable them to spend the rest of the semester working on the skills, vocabulary and knowledge they would need if they were to start the course at a level closer to that of other students.

Having 'taster' sessions in which they could visit a few classes of interest during their independent learning time was a suggestion given by Abdel: "We can find some students who are interested in different subjects and we can send him to just to know the atmosphere of this course. If he found himself. This is me or not." This idea was also put forward by Ben-Moshe et al. (2008) in a best practice guide for working with refugee-background students in tertiary settings. These researchers suggest that giving students the opportunity to try different courses can increase understanding of systems and career pathways.

Spending time discussing courses and careers was inspirational for Niesha, a mother of two, who felt that she would now consider her future in a different way:

> When I'm home with my husband and my daughters, I'm like 'I have everything. He's studying, he will work. It's fine. I can stay at home with my daughters and just relax', but [now] it's like I want to do something. I want to be something, be someone.

Orientation (to Systems and Styles)

Previous studies have shown that refugee-background students do not feel well orientated to Western education systems and the facilities available to help them on their learning journey (Earnest et al., 2010; Naidoo, 2015). Although most institutes organise orientation sessions, some refugee-background students have reported missing these due to

not knowing the reason for them (O'Rourke, 2011) while others felt that the sessions would be yet another burden on an already busy schedule (Harris & Marlowe, 2011).

Even though the participants were already based at the institute in which they would continue their studies, there were still gaps in their knowledge of support systems, as well as a lack of confidence in using them. Subsequently, the participants felt reluctant to seek assistance from formal support services and instead tended to turn to friends, family or trusted staff, such as teachers. This hesitancy to access established support systems was also found by Baker et al. (2018b) who pointed out that this reliance on teachers for assistance can result in an extra workload that can be exhausting and is often unrecognised by the institutes in which they work.

Having to learn to use online systems in their mainstream studies was another challenge mentioned by all the participants. This concern was commonly cited by students in other studies (e.g. Ben-Moshe et al., 2008; Silburn et al., 2010), and by the refugee-background students I had taught previously, particularly the mature students as many of them had extremely limited access to computers before commencing education in New Zealand. From visiting classes, the participants had gained awareness of how much online work would be required and felt that it would be helpful to do more computer work during their ESOL course. They suggested classes on basic computer use and online systems, as well as using laptops in class to write essays and search for information.

A further concern was that of understanding the different types of assignments that may need to be completed. The focus in many ESOL courses is essay writing, which can result in other styles of writing being neglected. The participants had indicated early on that they were unsure of the assignment types that would be required during their studies. Though I was aware that we did not teach all forms of writing used for assignments in mainstream courses, I lacked specific knowledge of what lecturers expected from their students. This indicated a knowledge gap that we were all experiencing.

Preparation for the Journey (Cultural Considerations and Learning the Language)

Once aware of what they needed to know, the participants requested guidance and practise in learning and using the competencies that would help them on the way. This included developing study skills and habits, gaining cultural knowledge, and improving their language ability.

Cultural Considerations

The participants had already noticed significant differences between learning and teaching styles in their home countries and those used in New Zealand. These included a more relaxed style of teaching, an expectation that students will think critically, and a greater emphasis on autonomous learning.

Even though attending mainstream classes had helped the participants feel more confident about approaching their lecturer to ask for help, they expressed a desire to learn more study skills that would help them keep up with the workload. A particular concern mentioned by all five participants was how to cope with reading requirements in their future courses. They had already pointed out that reading was not a normalised behaviour in their culture and subsequently they found it difficult to motivate themselves to read in their own time, for either study or pleasure. The exception to this was during Ramadan[21], at which time it is a requirement for Muslims to read or recite the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam; an experience described by Lena, "During Ramadan we have to finish the whole Qur'an and we do it, we can do it. We do it at least once. So, we have the reading culture, but we're not committed to it." They did, however, have some methods to encourage themselves to read, as Lena explained, "Sometimes we do like a competition between each other. I read it [the Qur'an] twice. This year I read it three times."

[21] Ramadan is a month-long religious occasion in which Muslims around the world focus on fasting, prayer, reflection, and community.

These comments on motivation to read prompted a discussion on ways they could establish new habits, such as reading at home for enjoyment. Three of the participants, who had children at school, felt their children were developing the habit but that they still struggled to do so themselves – not simply because it was a new habit, but also because of the many other household responsibilities they had to attend to first. With this in mind, Niesha felt the practice could be introduced slowly: "When we think about reading the whole book is a huge idea. Maybe some baby steps. One page a day. Only one page a day. Maybe that's the way." She also suggested that teachers read stories aloud to their classes so the students could learn correct pronunciation at the same time.

Having a chance to read different text types was another suggestion given to help promote reading. Niesha and Lena enthusiastically described the enjoyment they felt when one of their teachers gave them the task of reading a condensed novel in the form of graded readers[22] that they chose from the library. Reading fiction in this way was a new experience for them and one they found particularly rewarding, as Niesha described:

> The novels that we read, they were interesting, and we felt like if you could find a good book that has things that we like to read maybe that will help. It's like we were watching a movie and seeing it, but we were turning the pages.

Lena explained that she was so engaged in the story that her reading became more fluent, "Surprisingly I read it without translating and could understand it easily."

The participants felt that other ways of increasing their interest would be through access to stories from their own culture translated into English and through collaborative reading, where everyone in the class reads aloud with help from the teacher. As Niesha said: "I think instead of just letting us read on our own, if we're all reading together, it's easier to listen and read and understand and be able to answer the questions." Both these methods

[22] Graded readers are short books with simplified language, designed specifically to encourage reading in English language learners.

point to the need for ESOL teachers to have an in-depth understanding of different cultures in order to incorporate more culturally-relevant practices into the classroom.

Regardless of the activities used, Abdel felt that time was the key to developing language skills and confidence before reading could become enjoyable:

> I think it's much more the confidence of the language. We feel like we are not confident to speak or read or listen. . . . We will take our time. Maybe another couple of years to feel that you know more. If I'm going to read a story or a book, then I'm going to translate 10 to 15 words on each page so I will waste my time.

Learning the Language

For many refugee-background students, language is the most significant barrier to academic success (Kong et al, 2016). Not only is there a need for the academic language used in mainstream classes, but also for the language that will help students to communicate with others, which may include knowledge of colloquialisms, local dialects and other national languages.

Realising this, the participants all felt strongly that the language and content taught in ESOL classes needed to more accurately reflect the 'real world'. As Lena commented, "Maybe if we learn about the speed of talking, like the English in reality because here [in ESOL classes] we listen to the English in a different way [to how] people in reality speak."

The participants appreciated how the sessions had included interactions with native English speakers, as they believed this to be the 'real' language that they would be hearing and using on their journey. They felt these types of intercultural connections should be another priority of their ESOL courses with Abdel suggesting that "if we can engage the refugee-background students with the community or just to bring native speakers, native people to engage with so if we went to work, we can understand the accent. Just to engage." Although the polytechnic already held regular conversation sessions between students from other

departments and those in the ESOL classes, Abdel felt that more of these connections were needed if they were to adapt to the colloquial language used in mainstream courses.

Recognising that a significant majority of students at Otago Polytechnic are native speakers of New Zealand English, the participants strongly believed that they needed more exposure to local dialects in order to understand the accent and colloquial language used, as well as to adapt to the speed at which it is spoken. Given that some English-speaking countries, like New Zealand, have more than one official language[23], some thought must be given to incorporating terms and expressions from other languages that are used in everyday situations.

The need for authentic English in the classroom was highlighted by all the participants, who then voiced concern about the content of textbooks currently being used in their ESOL classes, as they felt that many of the topics and associated vocabulary did not adequately reflect their future needs nor did they give them an inclination to read for enjoyment. Niesha pointed out that she could not learn the language contained in them because she would never use it outside the classroom: "Useless some of them [topics in textbooks]. Maybe desertification was an impossible topic, so I feel like I don't get it." Lena added that "it has very technical words you can't hear in reality. . . . Even if you try to memorise them, easy to forget them because they aren't used in daily life."

All five participants felt that ESOL classes could be tailored more specifically to their future studies, possibly by integrating textbooks and other materials from their chosen courses so they could learn the most important vocabulary and concepts prior to commencing their studies. They also felt that reading and writing assessments could be adapted to focus on shorter and more relevant tasks. To do this, Niesha recommended:

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[23] As a New Zealander who acknowledges and recognises the significance of te reo Māori (the Māori language) as the indigenous language of this country and one of its three official languages, and tikanga Māori (Māori culture), I believe learning commonly-used terms, as well as the beliefs and customs attached to these, should be a key component of any ESOL course taught in New Zealand.

> I think we can choose a topic that we want really, especially for our tertiary studies. We had one essay to do, one research essay, but at that time I didn't have an idea of study in the future. But that was a good thing to write an essay on the topic that we want to write but maybe instead of doing 800 words and only one, we could do 200 words or 300 words and maybe four or five essays. That will be more helpful [because] then we will choose a topic that we like to improve our vocabulary or language in.

The relevance of the content in ESOL textbooks is a concern that has been raised by a number of ESOL researchers. While there are some valid reasons for using textbooks, such as the consistency and scaffolding they provide, Wallace (2006) argued that instead of reflecting reality, ESOL textbooks "play safe by representing an idealised world where no-one is ever unhappy, sick or poor. The overwhelming impression in the global course book is of success, good health, wealth and whiteness" (p. 9). Hayward (2007) voiced a similar concern, "Textbooks and course materials seldom include controversial topics. These resources are frequently sexist and rarely, if ever, inclusive of refugee learners" (p. 104). The participants' call for more interactions with native speakers and less reliance on global textbooks is in line with that of Marr and English (2019) who stated that language used in the classroom needs to be relevant, authentic and appropriate for the learners' context.

Dealing with Challenges (Time Management and Trauma)

The participants were aware of the many obstacles that could prevent them from reaching their destination. In this study and in many others (e.g. Earnest et al., 2010; Silburn et al., 2010), time management was considered a significant issue, particularly given the responsibilities that refugee-background students must deal with outside the classroom. As Abdel pointed out: "Sometimes it's challenging. We have some responsibilities to our religion, and to our family, to our culture."

Nevertheless, the students felt the time management and problem-posing sessions had given them the opportunity to consider strategies that would help them cope with the time constraints resulting from their many responsibilities. These strategies included gradually increasing the time they were currently spending on their English studies, planning ahead so that their assignments would be completed on time, and asking for help when needed. Najila had started to manage her time more effectively by dedicating one hour of independent study to every hour she spent in class while Abdel had decided to take a break between English language studies and mainstream studies to give himself more time to prepare: "My strategy now is to have six months to plan for the next stage. I will have a lot of strategies to organise this."

The Effects of Trauma

A key aspect that needs to be addressed is that of trauma – particularly given that refugee-background students have an increased risk of PTSD (Steel et al., 2009) and because the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019 coincided with this study – and how to teach students who have lived through traumatic experiences. Having previously had students show signs of trauma in class, I asked for the participants' thoughts on how to deal with these difficult situations. Although they recognised that opinions on this may vary widely, they all felt that any discussion about traumatic issues should be avoided in class with Niesha suggesting the topic be changed rather than risk bringing up "more emotions and a lot of things".

Even though the participants preferred to forget their past experiences while studying, they acknowledged the impact these had on their memory and ability to focus. As Abdel explained, "I think the war has caused us a lot of mental issues so part of it, like focusing on study, I couldn't do more than 15 minutes." He added that current pressures meant he was always aware of other things he needed to be doing, "I have a lot of stuff to do. I have family. I have to do something. I have to go to work. I have to. So, I can't do study more than 15

minutes, sit still." He also believed his past experiences had contributed to the memory difficulties he experienced on a day-to-day basis, "In class when a teacher speaks for two or three minutes, I can repeat everything he says, you know, but when it come the next day, I completely forget."

Cognitive effects, such as those mentioned by Abdel, as well as headaches, anxiety and sleep deprivation can make it more difficult to learn. In a study of Iraqi refugees in Sweden, Söndergaard and Theorell (2004) found that those with cognitive effects resulting from trauma experienced significantly slower rates of learning another language than other students. Mangan and Winter (2017) point out the need for educators of refugee-background students to have training to increase their awareness of the effects that emotional and psychological strain resulting from the refugee experience have on academic performance.

Despite the challenges they faced, the participants all felt that studying was beneficial. As Lena explained, "In my point of view, while we are doing studying, homework and things like that we can rid our thinking of what happens in our hometown, but when we are free, we will think more."

Nevertheless, the participants were caught between desperately wanting to study and being unable to do so as a result of the war experiences that they still had to face, despite having left their home countries. Abdel felt that they needed more time to deal with the pressure:

> We need more time to forget or lose that pressure. You know we just now ignoring that pressure but once a month when I open the news, when I open Facebook, my friends from Syria or Lebanon or Arabic countries, when I see some news you know, so I will start thinking again and the pressure come back. We need the time. This time will help us from a side and will take from us the other side. I don't know how we can deal with that.

Although the participants appreciated the teachers being aware of the issues resulting from both past and present experiences, they did not want lenience because of them. Abdel pointed out that at times pressure could be useful: “I need some pressure sometimes, like ‘you have to do homework’, just to refocus you know or to give us more power to focus on study.”

The issue of trauma and the need for professional development in this area has been raised by many staff working with refugee-background students (e.g. Hayward, 2007; Nelson & Appleby, 2015). Like many other teachers, I had been given no prior training in working with trauma and I felt ill-equipped to deal with some of the episodes occurring in my classes. Even though delving more deeply into how to deal with trauma was beyond the scope of this study, I feel strongly that teachers of refugee-background students should be offered more guidance and training in this area.

This chapter looked at suggestions on how ESOL teachers can guide refugee-background students on their journey into mainstream tertiary studies. Using a collaborative approach, the key priorities for teachers were as follows: understanding the current situation of their students, including the strengths they bring to their studies; providing guidance toward appropriate courses and careers; helping students to prepare by looking into what lies ahead and developing skills and strategies to help overcome potential challenges; seeking new ways of teaching and learning matched to the cultural learning styles of the students; and working on language skills using ‘real life’ English. The next chapter will use a critical perspective to explore how these recommendations could be implemented.

Chapter 7 – Where to from Here? A Critical Perspective

If people were silent, nothing would change.[24]

Malala Yousafzai

This thesis journey began with the aim of finding a way that I could better support refugee-background students going into mainstream tertiary courses. As Malala Yousafzai reflects in the quote above, we cannot stay silent and expect things to change. Likewise, we cannot always wait for change to happen before we start our journey. This research, like others before it (e.g. Earnest et al., 2010; Naidoo, 2015; O'Rourke, 2011), has identified many of the challenges that refugee-background students face in their studies; challenges that the participants and I worried that – for some – could prove insurmountable. While the previous chapter used a collaborative approach to suggest ways ESOL teachers could best support their students, this chapter examines the way forward from a critical perspective.

How can any student succeed on a pathway where barriers are constantly placed in their way? As a guide, I see my role as one that not only prepares the traveller for the journey ahead, but also keeps an eye on the path so that persistent obstacles can be removed. By looking at the role and responsibilities of ESOL teachers, institutes, and the Government, as well as the content of the curriculum, from a critical perspective, this chapter will consider ways of giving refugee-background students the same chance of completing and succeeding in mainstream tertiary classes as any other student.

The Role and Responsibilities of the ESOL Teacher

In doing this project, I took on a critical approach and as difficult as it was, I started by judging my own beliefs and practices. As an ESOL teacher who has always considered reflection an essential part of professional development, I recognised that I needed to take this to a deeper level and subsequently I support Hayward's call (2007) for critical pedagogy to be

[24] Yousafzai (n.d.)

used alongside all ESOL programmes and for all teachers of refugee-background students to be trained in how to use it. By looking at my own teaching from a critical perspective, I quickly realised that I had been using the same methods to teach refugee-background students as I had with the hundreds of international students I have taught – regardless of their culture, their prior learning experiences, and their purpose for studying. I had not been getting to know my students in a way that would help me identify where they were at the time and what they needed to know.

A good guide knows about those they are guiding. In my classes, I ask students to discuss aspects of their culture and I talk about that in relation to my culture. I have always considered this 'sharing cultures' and thought I was learning about the students through doing so. Yet, when the participants started talking about their prior learning experiences, their childhood dreams, the difficulties they dealt with on a day-to-day basis, and their fears about their future educational experiences, I realised I did not really know them at all. I had either not been asking the right questions or I had not been actively listening and as a result, I had missed out on valuable information that could help me teach them more effectively and subsequently could help them learn more effectively. As Lenette and Ingamells (2013) warn, "the wealth of experience-based knowledge that all students bring, and the cultural and professional knowledge that adult, educated migrants and refugees hold, are at risk of being discounted in contemporary learning and teaching processes" (p. 66). By not learning more about my students, I was contributing to this situation.

Using Freire's problem-posing method (1970), the participants and I were able to pool our knowledge and subsequently consider ways of bridging the cultural divide between us. In a collaborative environment, we were able to speak openly and honestly without judgement, enabling us to identify some of the knowledge gaps that could have a profound impact on their ability to study successfully in the future, such as the differences between their expectations and the reality they would encounter. Completing a journey becomes significantly more

difficult when you have little idea of what lies ahead – as many of my previous students had discovered. Neither the participants nor I had known what they did not know until we opened a dialogue. Unfortunately, this is not an uncommon situation. In a paper on whether universities were meeting the needs of refugee-background students, Earnest et al. (2010) suggested they were not and that for them to do so would require "deeper cross-cultural awareness and avenues for communication so that students from refugee backgrounds become familiar with the expectations of their teachers and universities and vice versa" (p. 171). For teachers working with students from all over the world, it is essential to avoid making generalised assumptions and instead actively learn about the knowledge and expectations that each student holds.

Dialogue with the participants enabled me to realise the fears they had about various aspects of studying, such as coping with the reading requirements in mainstream education. Yet, in a very short time, they gave me several ideas that I could incorporate into my teaching to encourage them to read more and to help them develop a love of reading. I realised then that my students could be my greatest teachers. Although I belonged to an English teaching organisation and other support networks, I had largely failed to keep up to date with the latest research nor did I undertake research myself. According to Borg (2009), this is a common scenario among ESOL teachers. In interviewing 505 ESOL teachers from 13 countries, he reported that there were "moderate to low levels of reading and doing research, with a lack of time, knowledge, and access to material emerging as key factors" (p. 358).

Another element of teaching that also needs to be assessed using a critical perspective is that of technology (Freire, 2014). As systems within educational institutes stride increasingly towards technological ways of teaching and learning, I feel myself struggling to keep up. Having little time available to learn online systems, I tend to use them in a limited way, and as a result do not provide my students with the opportunity to become accustomed to their use. Realising the need for computers in both their studies and working life, the participants felt

strongly that they needed to connect more with technology. As mentioned previously, for many adult refugee-background students, computer literacy is a challenge. However, it is one that could be incorporated into ESOL classes and where possible involve students using the same online systems to do the same types of assignments that they would be required to do in their future studies. The participants also felt that using computers in class to work on essays and other writing exercises would enable them to become more comfortable with technology, save time, and improve their typing skills.

Learning the language in the time available was the key concern of the participants. They mentioned repeatedly that the language they were learning in class was not the language they would hear in reality. I had always considered language as my forte given that teaching it was my job. Yet, as a result of this project I reconceptualised my idea of language teaching. Language does not exist in isolation, but as part of the world around it and as such classes must also incorporate the authentic language that students encounter in their day-to-day reality. I needed to give my students more access to the language being used outside the classroom. This is where the idea of teachers and students being ethnographers in their own environment by actively seeking to find out the language they would need to learn becomes particularly pertinent (Marr & English, 2019). Only by knowing the language being used in the students' world can we help them to use it.

As far as practical, my role as the guide involves helping my students recognise and appreciate the knowledge they have now and then working with them to find ways to bridge gaps between that and the knowledge they would need for their future studies. Once equipped with that knowledge, they can decide whether it is a journey they actually want to take. Some students may decide to delay – as three of the participants did – while others may decide that it is not a journey they wish to make. As a guide, it is my responsibility to ensure that the person I am guiding can make an informed choice about whether to go on.

A crucial aspect of critical pedagogy is exposing the inequities that exist within a system (Giroux, 2003), particularly by looking at the curriculum components, institutional practices, and governmental policies that create further challenges for refugee-background students. This is essential if we are to meet the United Nation's sustainable development goal to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

Before going down the critical pathway, it is important to acknowledge the risks that many teachers face when taking this route. Not all teachers are employed in a permanent position and those who do not have a sense of security in their job may be less inclined to speak out. Although I have been on temporary contracts since I first began teaching refugee-background students and I acknowledge that there are risks in pointing out inadequacies in the system within which one works, I feel fortunate to be working for an institute that values critical thinking and encourages staff to speak out about changes they want to make or any inequities they think should be addressed.

Curriculum Concerns

Typically, English language institutes use a globalised textbook in the classroom. The concerns regarding these mentioned earlier, both personally and by the participants, have been voiced by other researchers (e.g. Hayward, 2007; Marr & English, 2019; Wallace, 2006). As Wallace (2006) argues, "ESOL students have potentially rich textual resources which are typically not acknowledged in the classroom: in particular, the textual options embodied by the published textbook or the worksheet do not do justice to the rich and diverse textual worlds which adult ESOL learners inhabit" (p. 1). If textbooks are used, the texts within them may need to be adapted or replaced and activities used alongside them carefully analysed for purpose.

Freire (1970) pointed out that to address inequities, the curriculum needed to be designed by the teachers and the students together. Nevertheless, even though the thought

of this appeals, given the heavy workloads that seem to be prevalent among English language teachers, it needs to be acknowledged that this may be easier said than done. Teachers need the time and the training to be able to construct a curriculum that can meet the needs of the student while also meeting the requirements of the qualifications the students are working towards and the institutes in which they study.

The Role and Responsibilities of Tertiary Institutes

Throughout this study, both the participants and I felt that there was an inequity prevalent in their situations when compared to those of local students. It was as if the local students had been given a head start that would grow increasingly longer as the journey progressed. This inequity has been recognised in Western institutes throughout the world with many researchers, such as Mangan and Winter (2017), calling for institutes to critically assess whether their policies and practices promote equality and equity.

Even with collaboration, the participants and I did not have all the answers, and it was obvious that further collaboration was necessary. For example, we had very little idea of what was happening in the mainstream tertiary classes where they would study in the future. If you do not know what the journey will involve, how can you prepare for it? This need for more communication between students, their teachers and the institute in which they study was pointed out by Earnest et al. (2010). Collaboration should not be restricted to use within the classroom. More opportunities need to be made available for staff within all departments to meet with students and discuss their needs, and then endeavour to find ways to meet these.

The refugee-background students in this research pointed to gaps that existed between their starting point and that of students with English as a first language who have grown up in this culture and who have already studied in a Western education system. This suggests that additional support needs to be provided – both at the ESOL level and in mainstream studies. The participants were able to identify many ways that they could be supported out of class time – both during their ESOL courses and when they moved into

mainstream study. Specific suggestions included additional writing classes, tutorials, and a place where they could get together regularly to discuss issues they may be having in class, as described by Abdel:

> If we have a writing problem, we can sit down with a group and a tutor or somebody [to] help us or to have something the teacher handed to us, like information that will be useful for you. If you want to study this or you are going to study this or you are weak at this, have this, it will support you, something like this. Or can show us a website, if you went there, you will find a lot of information that will support things. Just like once a month, if you made it like a normal meeting, just like other clubs. Just like student clubs, you can discuss a lot of stuff, what is good, what is useful, what is not useful, what best way to start with. Something like this – chai and chat.

The students' acknowledgement of and request for additional support on their journey reflected the needs specified by refugee-background students already in mainstream education (e.g. Baker et al., 2018b; Earnest et al., 2010; Silburn et al., 2010). If this support can be put in place earlier, some of the obstacles they face later in their journey may be avoided.

However, even when support is available, refugee-background students may be reluctant to use it, seeking help instead from friends, family and trusted staff members, often ESOL teachers (Baker et al., 2018b). Given the extra responsibilities this can place upon teachers and the risk that students may not get the most appropriate advice, institutes need to consider ways of improving the connection between students and generalised support systems. Earnest et al. (2010) point out that "the multifaceted needs of students from refugee backgrounds require a coordinated approach from university teaching and support staff that specifically deal with their needs" (p. 171). One approach suggested by a number of researchers is that of setting up peer mentoring schemes (Joe et al., 2011; Onsando & Billett, 2009). This can not only help with academic success but can also provide opportunities for

refugee-background students to establish a sense of belonging within the institute in which they study.

As has been discussed in other studies (e.g. Harris & Marlowe, 2011), it needs to be recognised that refugee-background students are not the 'norm' and therefore cannot be treated in the same way as domestic students or other international students. Addressing the gaps between the different cohorts of students can lead to an increased workload for staff. While working on this thesis, I was planning, teaching, designing and moderating assessments, supervising and marking exams, and supporting refugee-background students who had already entered tertiary studies. I was also meeting one-to-one with students who were struggling to pass their exams as a result of the many responsibilities in their lives and were therefore at risk of losing their student allowance and having to give up their studies. The burden associated with these tasks led to burnout and finding external agency support in this regard was difficult. Although this research looks specifically at how ESOL teachers can support their refugee-background students to transition into mainstream tertiary studies, it is necessary to point out that teachers themselves need to receive support from the institutes in which they work. As Harris and Marlowe (2011, p. 193) point out, institutes "need to be alert to this change and respond on a structural level rather than simply expecting staff to absorb the impact of increasing expectations in this and other areas."

Furthermore, teachers need training to be able to deal with situations that may arise in class that are quite unlike any that they have previously encountered. In working with refugee-background students, trauma is a key issue that needs to be addressed. As Hayward (2007) recognised, if teachers were "aware of the appropriate professional responses to trauma, they would be less likely to trigger re-traumatisation, and instead, would be better equipped to be able to contribute to the recovery process" (p. 111).

In considering the best pathway from ESOL classes to mainstream studies, it may be that an additional 'bridge' needs to be built. Some of the participants felt strongly that there

needed to be a preparation course specifically tailored for refugee-background students – a course before the polytechnic's other bridging courses, which are designed as a bridge to certificates, diplomas and degrees for those who do not have the necessary qualifications. This suggestion was also given by African and Middle Eastern students entering Australian universities; some of whom had been through a preparatory course and subsequently felt as ready for their university studies as students who had been through the Australian school system (Earnest et al., 2010). Although Baker et al. (2018a) established such a course, they pointed out that "programs such as these can fall victim to government tender processes and policy shifts which move funding away from established institutions and programs. . . . we need to think long-term and for flexible, creative and collaborative endeavours" (p. 77).

The Ministry of Education (2014) released suggestions on how to help refugee-background students in the New Zealand school system to succeed in their studies. These included peer tutoring, bilingual tutors, mentoring, homework programmes, self-accessed learning centres and education on *how* to learn, rather than just *what* to learn. These evidence-based suggestions could also be applied at a tertiary level. However, it needs to be recognised that this requires institutional support. Harris and Marlowe (2011) pointed out the need for the tertiary sector to acquire "a greater ongoing commitment towards developing more sophisticated understandings of this small, but important, student body while developing responses grounded in broad cultural competence, and sensitive to the already extensive demands on both staff and students" (p. 194).

Governmental Responsibilities

Finances and time given to study were key issues that I felt, as an ESOL teacher, I could not address personally. However, as a critical pedagogist who has witnessed the issues first-hand and has discussed them at length with students and others working in the field, it is my responsibility to point out that given the many challenges they face while adapting to a new

life, new culture and new country, refugee-background students need to be given more time to learn the language.

The participants voiced a desire to begin their mainstream journey in a similar position to that of other students on their courses, rather than further behind and always struggling to catch up. Yet, they realised how unlikely this would be given the vast difference in English language ability. In a New Zealand context, ESOL students are required to go through each of the NZCEL levels in 17 weeks. On average, it takes about three years for students to complete NZCEL Levels 1 to 4 (the highest level offered at Otago Polytechnic). However, in a literature review on language acquisition, Collier (1989) estimated it would take migrant adolescent students five to seven years to reach a level of academic language equivalent to that of native speakers. This discrepancy between the length of time students usually need to learn a language and that given to refugee-background students not only puts them at an immediate disadvantage, but also adds stress during a time when they are already dealing with the numerous other issues that have been mentioned previously.

The participants all felt strongly that most people underestimate the time it takes to learn a language. As Lena reflected, "I thought that in three years I will know all the conversations I will listen [to] in English, but the reality is more difficult than I imagined." Abdel also wondered whether the amount of time for learning English was sufficient for him to succeed in the mainstream tertiary or whether he would need to take a break from studies in order to prepare further:

> Maybe we are not ready for this stage. We need to do something before this so the teacher will do his normal job and we can be a normal student when we are ready to process the information of what the teacher said. . . . Maybe I will wait for a few years, maybe another two or three years and then I will go back to study. I thought maybe I will have the thinking in English then I will go to study because for the meantime I'm still thinking in Arabic.

Recognising that it would take them considerably longer to process the language than native speakers, the participants believed that this should be acknowledged in mainstream education through such considerations as additional time in exams. As Lena pointed out:

> We won't be as good as they are because we have to think. Like for me, when I read the first time . . . I translate in my mind and look at new words. The second time, I can get the full idea so that takes us more time to understand. So that [more time in exams] will be really helpful if they give us opportunity to have more time to think.

Although the participants gave many suggestions for ESOL teachers to use that may help them on their journey, they felt that receiving 'equity' status was essential for them to be able to study at a level equal to local students who already had the advantage of knowing the language, the education system, and options for courses and careers. They felt empowered to work towards this but were unsure of how to do so, as Abdel noted:

> [We need] something from government or something from politics. What we can do from our side to do this? I mean to make it happen . . . Can we say, 'We have the issues or problem, but we have a solution, we need your help'?

Being able to study part time was a desire of all the participants who felt they needed time away from their studies to build a new life, help their families and improve their own mental health. If they were able to continue accessing a student allowance, the ability to study part time would also help financially. Although worried about the workload, Abdel planned to continue working part time while he studied. The request for more flexible study was also voiced by Australian refugee-background students interviewed by Ben-Moshe et al. (2008). The ability to study part time has contributed to academic success for other non-traditional students, with Markle (2015) finding that women aged 25 and older enrolled part time in colleges in the United States were more likely to persist in their studies than those studying full time. However, more recent research from Australia has found that part-time students are significantly more likely to drop out of their studies, largely due to the many other

priorities they must manage (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018). These researchers recommend that students be warned of the risk of not completing part-time study and be monitored more effectively at times of re-enrolment to ensure they are on track for completion.

Attention must also be drawn to the financial situation of many refugee-background students. Although the participants were grateful for student allowances, they realised that the amount of time taken to study English would use most of their allowance allocation. As a result, any future studies would come at an even greater cost to them than for other domestic students. This situation means that refugee-background students who arrive in New Zealand without English language skills may not have access to an allowance if they choose to go on to degree programmes, leaving them with a much larger student debt than domestic students.

Limitations

In addition to viewing current pedagogical, institutional and governmental practices, as well as the curriculum, from a critical perspective, it is necessary to do the same with this thesis journey by considering its limitations, as well as suggestions for future research.

This project was conducted over a short period with only one ESOL teacher working with five participants who had all come from the same area of the world – the Middle East. This could make the findings difficult to generalise to other contexts or situations, particularly as the five students came from a variety of backgrounds – two had completed secondary education while three had not, three had children while two did not, and two could use computers competently while the other three were still learning. Nevertheless, this growing diversity is typical of classrooms throughout the world (Hawkins & Norton, 2009) and therefore could also be considered a strength of the study as it offers suggestions on the use of collaborative problem posing to find solutions for students regardless of their background.

Another limitation was the small amount of time dedicated to the tertiary preparation sessions. A project that runs for 20 hours can in no way deal with every challenge that refugee-background students face as they enter mainstream tertiary studies. However, this

demonstrates a very real need for an ESOL curriculum that can address potential issues within classes. Furthermore, it accentuates the need for institutional and governmental recognition of the obstacles that must be overcome if refugee-background students are to succeed within a Western education system.

A strength of this study is that it has looked at perspectives of both the refugee-background students and the ESOL teacher within the same study. Although this collaborative approach has been encouraged by other researchers (e.g. Nelson & Appleby, 2015), it does not appear to have been widely taken up as a research method. Such an approach means that not only have learning and teaching strategies been discussed from both perspectives, but that a combination of Middle Eastern and Western cultural preferences and ideas have shaped the suggestions given.

Future Research

In giving suggestions for future research, it is important to point out that research involving former refugees should be done *with* them not *on* them – giving them an opportunity to share their own voice (Changemakers Refugee Forum, n.d.). By having ESOL teachers and refugee-background students working together, the divide between perspectives is likely to reduce and more understanding can develop as a result. A wider cultural perspective is also more likely to bring about new ideas that can help bridge any differences and subsequently lead to more effective teaching and learning practices.

Research involving adult refugee-background students going into mainstream tertiary studies is limited. This study introduces some new perspectives and ideas, yet there is still much that needs to be done. Future research could involve interviewing adult refugee-background students who have studied at a tertiary level – both those who have withdrawn from classes and those who have persevered. Those who have had to leave their studies could provide further insight into the obstacles they encountered on their learning journey while

those who are studying successfully can share their strategies, stories and experiences to inform and inspire others.

Future research could also look into how much time it takes students with educational gaps to improve their English. Research in this area could prompt the government to extend the amount of time given for refugee-background students to learn English without fear of losing their student allowance. An alternative approach could be research into whether using authentic materials can accelerate learning so students can improve more rapidly while still retaining new information.

This chapter has looked into the way forward from a critical perspective, including the role and responsibilities of the ESOL teacher, the curriculum, institutional practices, and governmental policies. In addition to highlighting inadequacies, recommendations were given within each section. Furthermore, a critical light was cast over this study itself in terms of limitations and suggestions were given for future research and recommendations. The next chapter will introduce The COMPASS Model – a model of guidance for ESOL teachers of refugee-background students.

Chapter 8 – The COMPASS Model

Compassion is the radicalism of our times.[25]

The Dalai Lama

As a teacher of refugee-background students, I have long felt that I needed some guidance. The participants in this study provided information and insights that helped me recognise they were guiding me as much as I was guiding them. Their honesty, openness and critical reflection inspired me to keep going – long after I wanted to abandon my thesis journey – in order to provide direction to other ESOL teachers who may feel equally lost.

Using the participants' input, along with that of the teachers and researchers cited previously in this thesis, I have designed The COMPASS Model to help answer the question – In what ways can ESOL teachers best support the successful transition of refugee-background students from English language classes to mainstream tertiary studies? In short, my experience with the students in this research suggest that such support involves Collaboration, Orientation, Multiple Literacies, Personalised Learning, Advocacy, Strategising, and Self-Care.

Instructions on COMPASS Use

Before using the COMPASS, it is important to establish the current situation by considering the skills, strengths and knowledge refugee-background students bring to their studies. Likewise, it is essential to determine their destination: Do your students know where they are going? How did they make that decision? How can you incorporate the knowledge they need into your classes so they can make informed decisions about their next step?

Once the current position and destination have been determined, it is time to use the COMPASS.

[25] The Dalai Lama (as cited in Jampa Ling Trust, 2018, para. 5)

Collaboration

- Collaborate with your students by sharing knowledge, ideas, skills and world views.
- Collaborate with other ESOL teachers to share thoughts, ideas and best practice tips.
- Collaborate with mainstream lecturers to find out what happens in a mainstream classroom and to share information about the teaching of refugee-background students.
- Collaborate with mainstream lecturers to find out ways refugee-background students in ESOL classes can share their cultural knowledge with students in their area of interest.
- Collaborate with executive teams within your institute to find ways to implement equity policies for refugee-background students.

Orientation

- Orientate your students to tertiary studies, including course and career choice, enrolment procedures, student support services and any other systems that may be new to them, such as using the library, photocopying and printing services, and health, study, and recreational facilities.
- Equip students with sociocultural knowledge, such as the likely gender imbalance in certain courses, to give them the opportunity to make an informed decision before enrolling.
- Ensure students know about the clubs and groups available to help them get to know other students. If possible, help them set up a refugee-background student club so that they can form a community of support.
- Help students learn how to use any technology they may need during their studies.

- Where possible, replicate mainstream systems within the ESOL classroom to help students become accustomed to them.

Multiple Literacies

- When considering what English to teach in class, make sure it is as authentic as possible – blur the boundaries between the classroom and the 'real world'.
- Ensure other languages that students will be exposed to are also incorporated within your classroom. In the New Zealand context, te reo Māori (the Māori language) should be integrated into the curriculum so students can become familiar and comfortable with its use.
- Bring in guest speakers so that students have more access to both native and non-native English speakers.
- Incorporate the sociocultural language that the students will encounter in their mainstream classrooms, including the colloquial language.

Personalised Learning

- Encourage students to become ethnographers in their own field to identify the language they will need to learn and use in their mainstream studies.
- Encourage students to write essays and other assessment tasks related to the area in which they would like to study.

Advocacy

- Be an advocate for sharing cultural knowledge, skills and ideas throughout the institute.
- Be an advocate for refugee-background students within your institute.
- Be an advocate for equitable education at an institutional and governmental level.

Strategising

- Use Freire's problem-posing method (1970) with refugee-background students to find strategies for any challenges they may encounter in their tertiary studies.
- Use strategising techniques with students to find culturally appropriate methods to handle teaching and learning issues in the English language classroom.

Self-Care

- Set healthy boundaries.
- Let your institute know when you need more support.
- Ensure you take time out for your own well-being.
- Remember that every journey is made one step at a time.

Compassionate Teaching

To orient ourselves, we need more than just a compass. When I realised that compass is the first part of the word *compassion*, I contemplated how no journey can be successfully completed if people along the way do not show compassion. Indeed, as the Dalai Lama's words at the beginning of this chapter demonstrate, showing compassion may well be the best way of changing this world for the better.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion – One Journey Ends

Under moonlight

An unknown route

A sky the colour of intense anxiety.[26]

We began and now we end this journey with the words of Behrouz Boochani, a Kurdish journalist, who fled Iran to Indonesia and then attempted to reach Australia by boat with other asylum seekers. The boat was intercepted by the Australian navy and Boochani was sent first to Christmas Island and then on to Manus Island where he was forced to live with many other asylum seekers in appalling conditions (Boochani, 2018). Boochani, a highly-educated political activist and now a prize-winning author, shared his journey in the beautifully-written book *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018). Although each chapter of this thesis starts with the words of a refugee who resettled in a new land, Boochani is the exception as he remains on Manus Island trapped between two worlds[27].

In many ways, this thesis encompasses many journeys. The journeys taken by the now famous refugees quoted at the beginning of each chapter, the journeys taken by the refugee-background students I teach, and my own journey, which began when I first started teaching English to refugee-background students in 2016.

In Chapter 1, I described how the students I taught had dreams of getting an education that would allow them to find good jobs, build new lives, and support their families while contributing to their new country. Yet, with the exception of a small handful, one by one they started dropping out of their mainstream courses. As I saw their dreams disintegrate, I realised I had not properly prepared them for what was ahead, and I felt that I was letting them down. I knew that I had to start looking into ways of supporting them to get the

[26] Boochani (2018, p. 1)

[27] At the time this thesis was being completed, Behrouz Boochani had arrived in New Zealand on a visitor's visa and was considering asylum-seeking options.

education they deserved; an education that I – as a white middle-class New Zealander – had taken for granted. However, this was not a journey I could take alone, and I enlisted the help of five students to walk alongside me, in an attempt to make the road ahead easier for those who followed.

Others have been here before me,

and I walk in their footsteps.[28]

These are the words of Elie Wiesel, a Romanian-born Holocaust survivor who was sent to a concentration camp with his family during World War II. While he survived, the rest of his family died, and after the war, he was sent to France with a group of other child refugees. Wiesel, who was educated at the Sorbonne, became a journalist and then later an author when he moved to the United States. He was also a professor, political activist and Nobel Laureate (The Nobel Foundation, 1986).

Wiesel's words led us into Chapter 2 – a review of the literature of refugee-background students in tertiary education. Although the research base is gradually increasing, that which focuses on the learning journeys faced by adult refugee-background students in tertiary education is still limited, particularly in the transition from ESOL classes to the mainstream. The lack of statistical information makes it difficult to judge the success of refugee-background students in tertiary studies, but qualitative research reveals a number of obstacles these students must face, including a gap between their expectations of study and the reality encountered.

This research points to a need for more awareness of these issues within the Western education sector, as well as a need for educators to learn more about their students in order to help them succeed. There was a clear indication that taking a collaborative approach using Freire's problem-posing method of education (1970) could empower students to deal with

[28] Wiesel (1992)

challenges they face in the 'real world', as well as help ESOL teachers adjust their own practices to assist students in a successful transition to tertiary education.

Blessed are those who see beautiful things in humble places

where other people see nothing.[29]

Artist Camille Pissarro was a leading Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painter who was born in the West Indies and moved to France at the age of 11 for his studies. He sought refuge in England after fleeing France in 1870 at the outbreak of the French-Prussian war. During his time there, he met and exchanged ideas with other artists, bringing even greater creativity and freedom of expression into the world of art at that time (Cogniat, 1975). His words brought us into Chapter 3 and the research question that the participants and I would endeavour to answer: In what ways can ESOL teachers best support the successful transition of refugee-background students from English language classes to mainstream tertiary studies? This chapter outlined the methodology that would be used to answer the question.

After looking at the three key components of research – worldview, design and methodology (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018), I decided to begin this study with a focus group to find out more about the participants, the strengths they carried with them on the journey, and their expectations of the road ahead. From there, we would work collaboratively on an action research project to help them prepare for tertiary studies. I would use their comments and my own reflective diary to decide on methods that could be used in ESOL classes. At the end of the 10 sessions, we would meet for another focus group to discuss the road ahead and how best we could go forward. Realising the need for more support on this journey, we would use a critical approach and look at the curriculum, institutional practices, and the role of the Government.

[29] "Camille Pissarro quotes" (n.d.)

As you start to walk out on the way,

the way appears.[30]

The words of Persian poet and Sufi mystic Rumi took us into Chapter 4. Originally known as Jallâl al-Din Mohammad**,** Rumi was 12 years old when he fled Balkh (now Afghanistan) to escape the Mongol invasion of East Asia, travelling with his family to Konya (now Turkey). Over the course of his life, he wrote thousands of odes and became the most well-known of all mystic poets (Harvey, 1994).

In this chapter, through the use of a focus group, we explored the strengths and expectations of the five participants as they prepared to move from ESOL classes to mainstream tertiary studies. The experiences of one journey had equipped them with adaptability, a love of challenges, and the motivation to succeed. Yet, they were aware of the barriers ahead – largely due to the stories of those who had travelled the road before them. They spoke of the effects that their educational gaps might have, confusion over which direction to take, and concern over differences in teaching and learning styles. They knew that money and time and juggling priorities all stood as obstacles on the road. Their confidence in completing the journey was low but they were determined at least to begin.

Sometimes, reaching out and taking someone's hand is the beginning of a journey.

At other times, it is allowing another to take yours.[31]

Chapter 5 began with the words of Vera Nazarian, a prize-winning fantasy and science fiction writer. At eight years old, she fled the Soviet Union with her family, travelling through three countries before arriving in the United States at the age of 10. Nazarian was educated at Pomona College in California where she received a Bachelor of Arts with a double major in English and Psychology (Nazarian, 2019).

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[30] Rumi (n.d., as cited in Frankel, 2017, p. 15)
[31] Nazarian (2010, p. 186)

This chapter outlined the action research phase of this study. Preparing for their own journey, Abdel, Najila, Niesha, Lena and Rawan joined me to consider the best paths for them to take. Over 10 sessions that involved twists and turns, and bumps in the road, the participants discussed their expectations of further study and explored the different routes ahead by visiting classes to see if they matched reality. We also came up with strategies to overcome potential obstacles on the road and tried different activities that could be used in the ESOL classroom.

We teachers make the road,

others will make the journey.[32]

Chapter 6 started with the words of Victor Hugo, one of France's most famous writers and author of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *Les Misérables*. Hugo, who was also a poet, dramatist and human rights activist, left France at the age of 49 to live in exile in Belgium when Napoleon came to power (Barrére, n.d.). His words aptly describe the role of the teacher – preparing the road ahead for those who will take the journey.

In this chapter, I joined the five participants for a second focus group to find out which aspects of the preparation sessions best supported them on the path to future tertiary studies. Having visited classes, the participants were able to identify some of the issues they needed to overcome and suggest activities that could be incorporated in the ESOL curriculum. We looked at the concept of problem posing and how students could find strategies so that when obstacles appeared on the road – as they often do – it would not mean the end of the journey. Instead they would be able to come up with ways to keep going. In this focus group, we also discussed the cognitive and emotional effects that can result from being a refugee. Though resilient and strong, many refugee-background students carry their trauma as invisible luggage.

[32] Hugo (n.d., as cited in Gruwell, 2007, p. 29)

If people were silent,

nothing would change.[33]

Chapter 7 began with the inspirational words of Malala Yousafzai who, as a 15-year-old schoolgirl, was shot by the Taliban in Pakistan as she stood up for her rights as a girl to have an education. Yousafzai and her family escaped Pakistan and its oppressive regime and she now studies at Oxford University in the United Kingdom. At 17, she became the youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize (Yousafzai, 2018).

As a critical pedagogist, I also needed to speak out. Seeing the unfairness of the situation facing my students, I used a critical lens to examine my own teaching practice as well as the curriculum I was following. I also looked at the role of tertiary institutes in supporting refugee-background students and found that more targeted support needed to be set up to ensure that these students would have the best chance of success in their studies. Finally, I looked at the role of our government who agree to take in refugees, yet do not fulfil their responsibility of providing them with an equal chance to have the education that they deserve.

Compassion is the radicalism of our times.[34]

Chapter 8 began with words from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. The spiritual leader of Tibet and head monk of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama, was forced into exile in 1959. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his continued preaching of non-violence and willingness to compromise and work towards reconciliation (The Nobel Foundation, 1989).

In this chapter, I introduced The COMPASS Model, designed as a result of this study to help guide ESOL teachers as they work to support refugee-background students on their transition to mainstream tertiary education. Through the use of Collaboration, Orientation, Multiple Literacies, Personalised Learning, Advocacy, Strategising, and Self-Care, teachers can

[33] Yousafzai (n.d.)
[34] The Dalai Lama (as cited in Jampa Ling Trust, 2018, para. 5)

guide their students in the most effective way possible. The chapter finished with a reflection on the importance of compassion in the teaching profession.

As mentioned by Lenette (2016) earlier on this journey, we have a moral responsibility to offer former refugees the opportunity to receive an education. If we do not fulfil this obligation, we not only neglect to act fairly and ethically, but we are also at risk of missing out on all that they bring to our world; a world that would not be the same without the inspirational writers, artists, actors, poets, activists, spiritual leaders and Nobel laureates who have already walked this path as refugees.

As our journey draws to a close, I finish this thesis with the words that Behrouz Boochani used to finish his book *No Friend but the Mountains*. I hope they will inspire other ESOL teachers in the way that they have inspired me.

This will take time, but I'll continue challenging the system and I will win in the end.

It's a long road, but I'll do it.[35]

Behrouz Boochani

[35] Boochani (2018, p. 374)

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Appendix A

Date: 11 October 2018

Dear Amber Fraser-Smith

Re: Ethics Notification - **NOR 18/47 - Transitioning the Divide: A Project-Based Learning Approach for Adult Refugee Background Students Moving into Tertiary Education in New Zealand**

Thank you for the above application that was considered by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: **Human Ethics Northern Committee** at their meeting held on **Thursday, 11 October,**

Approval is for three years. If this project has not been completed within three years from the date of this letter, reapproval must be requested.

If the nature, content, location, procedures or personnel of your approved application change, please advise the Secretary of the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Professor Craig Johnson
Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand **T** 06 350 5573; 06 350 5575 **F** 06 355 7973

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Appendix B

1 October 2018

Amber Fraser-Smith

Dear Amber

Re: Approval for Research at Otago Polytechnic

I am writing to confirm that permission to conduct your research at the Otago Polytechnic Forth Street Campus under the oversight of your team leader Aaron Blaker was granted by Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee (OPREC) today.

This letter can be used as evidence to support the modifications required by the Human Ethics Applications NOR 18/47 at Massey University.

Please also advise us when your project has gained final approval from Massey University and when you wish to commence your Dunedin-based research.

Best wishes,

Liz Ditzel

Dr. Liz Ditzel
Co-Chair
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Appendix C

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
TE KURA O TE MATĀURANGA

Transitioning the Divide: A Project-Based Learning Approach for Adult Refugee-Background Students Moving into Tertiary Education in New Zealand

INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Amber Fraser-Smith and I am doing a Master of Educational Psychology degree at Massey University. I am currently undertaking a research project looking into ways that I can support students who have a refugee background as they move into tertiary studies.

I would like to talk with students like you to find out about your English studies in New Zealand so far and to talk about your expectations as you move onto further tertiary studies. In the second part of my research, I will work with you and other students with a refugee background on a project designed to help students feel well supported at Otago Polytechnic. The final part of the research will involve a discussion at the end of the semester to see whether working on this project helped you feel more prepared for tertiary mainstream studies.

What is the purpose of this research?

I currently teach the New Zealand Certificate of English Language at Otago Polytech. As a teacher, I want to find ways to help refugee-background students move into further tertiary courses and be successful in their studies. This research is looking at whether finding information about how to deal with new tertiary learning challenges can help adult refugee-background students during the early stages of their tertiary studies.

How were you chosen for this invitation?

I have asked teachers of NZCEL to pass on this invitation to refugee-background students entering post-English language tertiary education in 2019. If you would like to participate, please complete the informed consent form after reading through this information sheet.

Who am I looking for?

I am looking for volunteers to participate in this study. To take part you should:

- be an adult refugee-background student

- be starting (non-English language related) tertiary studies in the first semester of 2019

- not be entering tertiary studies directly from high school

You will be emailed a summary of the findings of this study. If you would like a full report, you can let me know.

If you participate, what will happen?

Your participation in this study involves three phrases.

In the first phase, you will take part in a two-hour focus group with five other refugee-background students to discuss your experiences of studying in New Zealand so far and your expectations of non-English related tertiary studies.

In the second phase, we will work together to find ways to help refugee-background students feel well supported as they move into tertiary studies. This project will take about two hours each week for about 10 weeks, but you are welcome to spend as much time on it as you want. As an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teacher at Otago Polytechnic, I will be working with you and supporting you during this process – whether that means pointing you in the right direction to find the information you need, answering questions or helping you with your English language skills.

In the third phase (at the end of the action research project), you will attend another focus group (for approximately two hours) in which we will discuss whether the project helped you feel supported as you moved onto your new course.

Throughout this study, you can contact me at any time. An email address is given at the end of this information sheet. Contact details for support services will also be available should you require them during this study.

If you participate, what will happen to the data?

The data is only used for the purposes of this project and you will not be identified – only pseudonyms will be used. Only my supervisors and I will have access to personal information and this is kept secure and strictly confidential.

Results of this project may be published or presented at conferences or seminars. At the end of this study, the list of participants and pseudonyms will be destroyed. All other information will be stored for seven years and then destroyed. The results will be complied as part of a thesis and submitted for examination. A summary of the findings will be emailed to you should you request this.

If you participate, what are your rights?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- refuse to answer any question;
- withdraw from the study at any time during the first three phases;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the focus group interviews;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

*** If you choose not to participate or if you withdraw, this will NOT affect your marks or participation in tertiary study in any way.**

If you have any questions, who should you contact?

If you have any questions or concerns, you can contact me at A.M.FraserSmith@massey.ac.nz.

You can also contact my supervisors:

Dr. Jude MacArthur: J.A.MacArthur@massey.ac.nz

Dr. Jayne Jackson: J.H.Jackson@massey.ac.nz

Thank you very much for considering being part of this research project. Please contact me if you are willing to participate or if you have any questions.

Amber Fraser-Smith

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, Application NOR 18/47. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Associate Professor Ajmol Ali (Acting Chair), Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern, email humanethicnorth@massey.ac.nz

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

Firstly, we're going to talk about your own experiences of tertiary education – both in your own country and in New Zealand.

- What was your highest level of study in your own country and when was that? What did you study?
- Thinking about your study here in NZ, what kinds of things are the same as in your home country? What is different?
- What are the good things about your study so far?
- What challenges have you had?
- After your English language studies, what do you want to study?
- How do you feel about going on to further tertiary studies?
- What are you most looking forward to?

Now, we're going to discuss tertiary education in New Zealand for any student with a refugee background.

- What things do you think refugee-background students would most enjoy about studying in New Zealand?
- What things would make it harder for a student with a refugee-background than for a New Zealander to study here (in New Zealand)?
- What skills and strengths do refugee-background students have that can help them succeed in their studies?
- What type of information and support do you think would help refugee background students succeed in their studies?

Appendix E

What are your course and career expectations?

- What job do you want in the future?
- What course have you chosen?
- Why did you choose that course?
- How much will this course cost you per year?
- What other courses might help you get the job you want?
- What type of jobs will you be able to get after taking this course?
- What % of students taking that course get jobs after graduation?
- What level of English is required for that course?
- What other requirements are there for that course?
- How many hours do you think you will need to study in classes at polytech?
- How many hours will you need to do independent study at home?
- What type of assessments will you have to do? (e.g. tests, essays, reflections)
- How many students will be in your class?
- What type of classes will you have? (e.g. lectures, tutorials)
- How much of your work will need to be completed online?
- What challenges might you have during classes?
- Who or what can help you deal with these challenges?
- What challenges might you have outside of classes?
- Who or what can help you deal with these challenges?