

Non-English subjects can help migrant and refugee children

September 8 2014, by David Ellis

New research at the University of Adelaide recommends that migrant and refugee children be exposed to more non-English-based subjects - such as art and sport - to help them to make friends, transition into school education and improve their wellbeing.

Researchers in the University's School of Psychology have studied the experiences of 60 migrant and refugee children aged from five to 13 years, and also sought input from 30 teachers.

"Our study considers what it means for refugee and migrant children to be 'doing well' psychologically, and takes into account their identity, education and settlement experiences across their first two years in Australia," says Dr Clemence Due, Lecturer in the University's School of Psychology.

Preliminary results have shown that the use of locally based intensive English language programs are beneficial for migrant and refugee children, especially to help them "soft land" into education in Australia.

However, the researchers have also found that children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds find it easier to bond with other students at [school](#) over subjects that don't have English literacy as their focus.

"Many of the children we studied were anxious about their English language competency and expressed concern that this would be an issue

for them as they transferred into mainstream classes," Dr Due says.

"Subjects that don't rely on English are particularly important to these children, allowing them to develop shared connections with other children at their school. These subjects - such as art or sport - are able to increase children's self esteem as they share their skills and talents, rather than focusing on English.

"English is still very important for these students, but transitioning into a mainstream primary school class can be a very difficult process for them. Establishing friendships is critical to their wellbeing. Given this finding, we believe it's important to ensure that children have the opportunity to build friendships at new schools through other areas they enjoy, in addition to receiving support for English language skills."

Dr Due says the study showed that school environments give [children](#) a range of opportunities to share their experiences, and that discussing differences in cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds is often important to them.

"Celebrating a diverse range of cultural and religious festivals, discussing and sharing food, languages, and presentations about families and countries of origin can all be very beneficial," she says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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