Milpera, Australia

"A Meeting Place for Us"

On a hazy Wednesday morning I arrive at a suburban station south of Brisbane, Australia, exit down the long platform, skirt the edge of the local cricket oval, and approach the Milpera State High School. Moving nearby along the dusty path are other latecomers, many of whom have to travel more than an hour by train and bus to reach school. As we cross the last street, large, hand-painted letters spelling out the name M-I-L-P-E-R-A greet us. Each letter has been decorated to represent the various cultures which have called this school home—Arabic, Vietnamese, El Salvadoran, African, and others.

The school is comprised of an administrative building, a teaching building of ten classrooms, two additional outbuildings, and a few small fields of grass. When I enter Room #1, students are engaged in a spelling test on words and expressions from previous reading. By now, 9:20 a.m., there are seventeen students present in class: thirteen African, three Middle Eastern and South Asian, and one European. A strong breeze stirs the curtains in the open windows, and we watch the leaves blowing off the trees in the courtyard outside. Dust from the western desert is blowing across the city of Brisbane, but here at Milpera the weather, like the instruction, is more accommodating, and the breeze feels great.

Most of the students at Milpera are in Australia because of wars, famine, or economic devastation in their homelands. Many have suffered the additional loss of parents and other family members. Some have low (or nonexistent) literacy in their native languages, and many have had few opportunities for formal education.

Such students enter high school well behind the grade level that their ages would indicate, and when they learn to read and write in English, they are learning to read and write for the first time. The very nature and culture of school can be foreign to them. Providing a quality education to such students presents a special challenge for schools and teachers. How can teachers and schools reach such students with the cultural, social, psychological, and academic support that they need as they redefine their identities in a new land?

At Milpera State High School, a newcomer program in Brisbane, Australia, this challenge is being met through a combination of social, cultural, and academic support grounded in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy offers educators a road they can walk with refugee and immigrant students as they find their way in a strange new land. It is "a pedagogy of engagement: an approach to [Teaching English as a Second Language] that sees such issues as gender, race, class, sexuality, and post colonialism as so fundamental to identity and language that they need to form the basis of curricular organization and pedagogy" (Pennycook, 1999, p. 340).

A critical, narrative research project conducted at Milpera in the waning months of 2003 describes how this school is able to reach refugee and immigrant newcomers through such pedagogy of engagement. This narrative portrait highlights ways in which critical leadership, critical teaching, and a focus on multiple intelligences and literacy serve to assist newcomers as they overcome trauma and develop their identities in Australia.

Finally, the critical work being done at Milpera offers implications to all schools serving refugees and immigrants.

Donald F. Hones is a professor in the Department of Educational Foundations, College of Education and Human Services, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

Immigrant Secondary Students

There have been some valuable contributions to research on effective educational practices for adolescent language learners in recent years (Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Lucas, 1997; Mace-Matluck, Alexander-Kasparik & Queen, 1998). In Australia there have been studies of immigrants in Sydney's high schools (Martin & Meade, 1979; Meade, 1981 & 1984); research which address the academic success of immigrant students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds (Cahill, 1999 & 1996; Thomas, 1999; Urbina & Cullen, 2000;); and a study of social development within Australian schools (Ainley, et al., 1998).

One of the greatest challenges facing immigrant language learners in high school is how to learn academic subject areas while at the same time learning a new culture and language. In actuality, many bilingual adolescents have limited formal education experiences in their countries of origin, low (or non-existent) literacy in their first language. These factors can contribute to a lack of academic success in high school, and sometimes a failure to graduate (Garcia, 1999).

Extensive scholarship suggests that a content-based instructional approach helps second language learners master academic language by providing them with thematically organized material in the ma-

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jor subject areas (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989; Gianelli, 1991; Mohan, 1986; Snow & Brinton, 1997). Nevertheless, minority language students are often separated for much of their high school career from challenging academic material and courses (Garcia, 1999).

Research has suggested several pathways to more effective practice with newcomer secondary students (Short, 2002; Short & Boyson, 2000). These include program emphasis on academic content and social knowledge; interdisciplinary, small groups led by a single teacher; early access to mainstream academic courses and transitions to higher education; extension of instructional time; systematic, ongoing assessment; teacher planning and implementation teams; strengthening of partnerships with parents and institutions; and better teacher preparation (Adger & Peyton, 1999; Garcia; 1999; Gottlieb, 1999; Merino, 1999; Short, 1999; Valdes, 1999).

Language acquisition and academic achievement is only part of the struggle for refugee and immigrant youth trying to adapt to a new society and a new school: Central to any child's learning are social and cultural processes (Thomas & Collier, 1996). It is in this social and cultural realm for newcomer students that the need for critical pedagogy is greatest.

Critical Pedagogy and English Language Learners

A holistic approach to addressing the lived experiences of immigrant secondary students can be found in critical pedagogy. In the past few years various scholars have taken Freire's (1970) work in problem-posing education into English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education contexts (Hones, 2002; Moraes, 1996; Wink, 1997). Putting this pedagogy into practice might include the development problem-posing literacy practices with immigrant women (Frye, 1999), acknowledging migrant students' lives in mathematics teaching (Trueba, 1998), and addressing issues of race and class in the U.S. system of justice (Hones, 1999). Critical pedagogy also is woven into teacher preparation for those working with immigrant populations in the U.S. and those teaching English abroad (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999; Mackie, 1999).

Many immigrant and refugee students in nations such as Australia and the United States have experienced war and economic devastation, and face daily the negation of their languages and cultures in a new society. For their teachers, critical pedagogy offers a pathway to engage these students, honoring their linguistic and cultural abilities, acknowledging their many struggles, and encouraging their academic and social progress through a transformative educational process. Importantly, educators who employ critical pedagogy can pursue what Gruenewald (2003) refers to as the twin goals of *reinhabitation* and *decolonization*: teaching youth how to live well in their total environments while challenging and changing ways of thinking that injure and exploit.

A Critical Narrative Portrait

This study develops a critical, narrative portrait of Milpera State High School, which I visited while on sabbatical in Australia in 2003. When I mentioned an interest in Australian programs for newcomers, colleagues at the University of Queensland suggested Milpera, which hosts the only newcomer program of its kind in Brisbane. Many educators I talked with had very high regard for the school's principal, Adele Rice. In this study, I rely on participant observation, field notes, and audiotaped interviews in order to build an interpretation that relies on rich description (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). I integrate historical, sociological, psychological, and cultural perspectives to find the "circles of meaning" present in the lives of participants at Milpera (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987).

A critical, narrative approach is used to reconstruct stories of the classroom and people's lives. Narrative research is chosen as a method in that it focuses on human agency, and the ability of individuals to creatively construct their lives within social and historical contexts (Casey, 1995). Critical narrative research involves a co-struggling with participants for cultural and political identity, and recognizes the role of politics in the work of democratic education (Moss, 2004).

The interpretative style for this ethnographic and narrative portrait draws on a combination of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and interpretive interactionism (Denzin, 1994). Interpretive interactionism "begins and ends with the biography and the self of the researcher," and encourages personal stories that are thickly contextualized, and "connected to larger institutional, group and cultural contexts" (Denzin, 1994, pp. 510-511). This study reflects an outsider perspective, that of a visiting U.S. citizen. My interpretation of the Milpera program is colored by comparisons made, consciously and uncon-

sciously, to contexts of bilingual and ESL education in the United States.

Sources of data for the study include participant observation and field notes in classrooms, around the school at Milpera and in the Brisbane community over the course of five weeks; photographs of classroom activities; audiotaped interviews with selected teachers and administrators; data collection from school and government records; and library research.

Milpera State High School

At Eight o'clock in the morning, well before the start of school, one of the fields outside Milpera is alive with the shouts and laughter of about 20 African students playing soccer. Near the office I meet Loyiso, a handsome Sudanese man in his 40s. He tells me that the youth on the soccer field are communicating with each other in *Arabiya Juba*, a form of Arabic spoken as *a lingua franca* through much of the Sudan. The Sudanese students have their own mother tongues as well. Few are literate in Arabic or any other language when they arrive to Milpera. Many students, in fact, have serious gaps in their prior formal education. One of the main challenges at Milpera is teaching such students basic literacy.

Of the approximately 160 students at Milpera, 60% are refugees, 40% are from Africa, and over 30% come from the Sudan. Other countries of origin include China, Liberia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The school is an English Language Preparation Center for the city of Brisbane. Students, who commute into the school from all over the metropolitan area, typically spend about six months at the school, at which time they are moved to secondary schools closer to home where they can continue to receive some ESL support. The ages of students range from 11-20.

Near the office are the parents of a new Sudanese student sitting in comfortable chairs. Down a short hallway is a large Aboriginal painting: Against a backgrounds of browns, reds, and blacks, there are concentric circles of small, white dots, surrounded by dozens of horseshoe shapes (seated human figures) facing in, framed by handprints. On the wall next to the office is a poster with life-size white hands, reading "Join Hands in Peace." By the door is a wall featuring photographs and names of all the staff. These include 23 teachers, 17 of whom are English teachers. Besides Loyiso, the school is served by two other Arabic-speaking aides, a Chinese bilingual aide, and a Vietnamese/Chinese aide.

Critical Leadership

Colleagues at the University of Queensland had told me about the strong advocacy role played by Adele Rice, the principal of Milpera. In her office, she tells me that the school came into being to serve influxes of refugee groups and other immigrants. These have included, over time, boat people from Vietnam, Chileans fleeing Pinochet and El Salvadorans fleeing the death squads, political refugees from Poland, and war-weary survivors from the former Yugoslavia, the Middle East, and Africa. Over time, the work of the school has changed to meet the changing needs of the new student populations, as Adele Rice explains:

> We haven't stood still. We have learned how to deliver our services better. With the Sudanese we are learning to start again with someone who is at a preschool educational level. In that respect it is never dull, it is never the same job.

Adele acknowledges that the school's settlement work is as important as its work teaching English and preparing students academically. This settlement work includes school health services, multilingual information for parents about the educational system, access to government services, and counseling.

Although the 25 teachers at Milpera all have their own unique styles and viewpoints, Adele feels there is a common understanding of their mission:

> There is a shared vision about receiving, nurturing, preparing and transiting people, so that each of them can achieve their potential, and that potential may be different. Our challenge for us every day is to do it in a way that is socially just and culturally inclusive, and to practice what we preach.

At present, close to one hundred students come from Africa, with those from the Sudan being the largest nationality at the school. Many of the Sudanese have lost one or both parents because of the war. In addition, many Sudanese did not receive much formal education in their native land, and enter Milpera with low or non-existent literacy in any language. Former students from Milpera have been at the top of their classes in Brisbane area high schools, and have gone on to university and successful careers. However, current students may take much longer just to grasp the basics of English literacy.

Another issue facing many students and their families are new restrictions for Australian immigration. In the last few years it has become increasing harder for refugees to prove their cases for asylum. Often they must languish for months in detention centers while their cases are considered, and there are fewer guarantees that they will be given permanent residency. Adele Rice showed me a photograph on her wall of two handsome young men with dark brown skin and dark eyes:

> They are Afghani boys here without parents. To prove that they are refugees, to be released from detention, and still not to have permanency, not to be able to go to the university…So what? You have advocated your head off, but at the end of the day, some of these fundamental things don't change…but maybe that is what puts the fire in your belly…

Critical Teaching

Jenny Miller, a post-beginning English teacher at Milpera, is well aware of the challenges faced by students at the school, especially through the lack of state and federal budget support:

The federal funding is not increasing, even though the kinds of kids who are arriving are much more needy. Some states match the federal funding. Queensland does not put anything in. The funding runs out after about six months; however, these kids are going to need probably two years of intensive work if they are going to even begin to cope with high schools. Across the board there is a lack of resources and personnel to deal with this.

Some of these African kids have immense emotional and social difficulties.

Yet, like Adele Rice, Jenny is not about to give in to the difficulties. Rather, she finds creative ways to move students ahead. She says, "Our approach is to have a real world experience and then to scaffold the language onto it." Like other teachers, she introduces students to language and literacy through classroom activities peppered with frequent field trips to places of educational and cultural interest.

Language Experience Approach

On a bright, windy morning Jenny Miller arrives to teach her beginning English class. There are thirteen children in the class, seven boys and six girls, some from Africa, some from South Asia, some from East Asia, and two from Samoa. In age they range from 11 to 20 years old. She asks the students to start describing their activities of the previous day, when they went on a field trip.

Jenny: Hands up if you can tell me something about yesterday?

Student: Ice blocks [Popsicles].

Jenny: We had ice blocks. Where did we begin? Look at the map. (She projects a map of Brisbane on the wall). Where did we start?

Student: New Farm.

Jenny: No. We finished at New Farm. (She circles New Farm on the map). Where did we start?

Student: Guyatt Park.

Jenny: Yes. We took the bus to Guyatt Park. (She circles the Guyatt Park boat landing on the map). What did we see?

The students begin to suggest things they saw, and Jenny writes them on the board graphically, with *We saw* circled, and each item attached by a line to the circle: building, bridges, Brisbane River, West End, South Bank, QUT, Kangaroo Point, city.

Jenny: We saw Kangaroo Point…and who lives at Kangaroo Point?

Students: Sahra! (she is a tall, slim student from Sudan).

Jenny projects a close up scene of Brisbane and the river on the wall, and asks the students to suggest what they see. They respond with building, buses, boat, etc.

Jenny: When did we do all this? Did we do this today?

Student: No, yesterday.

Jenny: (writing on board) Yesterday we went to New Farm by City Cat.

She has the students read the sentence in chorus. Then she asks students to suggest what happened on the field trip. They add several details. She needs to provide them with past tense verb forms, as they state everything in the present tense. She also asks students to suggest appropriate prepositions, and punctuation, at certain points in the story. She has the students copy the paragraph from the board into their notebooks, and then read it aloud in small groups. Jenny then underlines certain words in the paragraph:

Yesterday we went to New Farm Park by City Cat. We left school at 9 o'clock. On the boat we saw the Brisbane River, QUT, 6 bridges, the city center, and South Bank. We arrived at the park at 10 o'clock. We ate morning tea and we saw a bottle tree and jacarandas. Then we played. Kareem got stuck on the tree and he was scared and worried. In the river we saw a jellyfish. At 12 o'clock we came back to school.

Jenny goes through the selected words for pronunciation and comparison of similar sounds (e.g., the "c" sound in city and center). Next, Jenny asks students to look at the text and circle all the verbs. She tells them "Every sentence has a verb." After going through the verbs together, Jenny erases certain words (cloze exercise) and has students come up to the board individually and each put an erased word back into the paragraph. Finally, Jenny has students highlight every capital letter in the paragraph. Thus, she has generated a variety of literacy activities from this paragraph about the students' experiences of the field trip.

About 11:45 a.m., Jenny has students work on their pictures of the field trip, which they are drawing on large pieces of white paper. Two of the girls (from East Asia) have finished the assignment, and they are allowed to create a poster about the field trip in another room. Some of the boys are putting their countries' flags on their pictures, and one is writing a heading in stylized Farsi.

Some of the students, particularly the Samoan brother and sister and Sahra from Sudan, are quite artistic, especially in their renditions of stylized suns and the bottle tree. Two of the students from Afghanistan, a brother and sister, are drawing very nice renditions of the cartoon movie elephant, Dumbo, on the back of their papers. Jenny tells me that the girl, who is sitting by herself, has two black eyes she received from her brothers that week.

In discussing the upcoming Spring Break, Jenny suggests that for many students at Milpera, such breaks in their education can be difficult times:

> The vast majority love to come to school, and they don't like holidays. They've got nothing to do, and nowhere to go. They live out of the city, and they are going to be grounded in uninteresting suburbs for weeks at a time.
>
> The kids are going to be here a lot longer, and they are going to be challenged a lot more in high schools.

In much of her work, Jenny continually returns to this need for students to feel at home, to feel a sense of place at Milpera and in Brisbane, after all of the

displacement that has marked their young lives.

Language through Music

Susan Creagh teaches a post-beginning class at Milpera. Working with many older students who are just beginning to get a grasp on literacy, she can feel their sense of frustration and humiliation:

> There is no point in setting them up to fail. I want them to be able to express themselves in their own words and to be confident enough to do that. These African kids have very good listening and speaking skills, compared to other language groups. If I try to tap into that first, and they are confident with that, then link to the written word, I think that might be helpful for them.

One way that Sue, Jenny, and other teachers have found to involve students in oral language development is through music (Abbott, 2002). Huy Le (1999) suggests that teachers and students value music for teaching reading, writing and critical thinking, especially as songs encode cultural values and ideology. Music and art seem quite prevalent in many Australian schools, but at Milpera, they also serve as bridges to language development.

About 9:50 a.m. Jessica, a music teacher, enters Sue's classroom with a guitar. Students are asked to move the desks back and make a big circle of chairs. Jessica tells them they will be practicing a song, which Milpera students will be performing at an education office in downtown Brisbane in two weeks. She sang the song, one verse at a time, and then had students join in with an echo response and later, all together.

Milpera *mowayo*
It's a meeting place for sisters and brothers
Milpera, *mowayo*
It's a meeting place for us
Get up in the morning gotta get up and go,
eeyayay
Gotta move along gotta get up and go,
owowo
Got a better feeling got a safer place to stay,
eeyayay
Got a brighter future wanna get it today,
owowo
Milpera
Milpera *mowayo*
It's a meeting place for sisters and brothers
Milpera, *mowayo*

The song is very rhythmic and catchy, especially with the vocalizations at the end of each line. After this song, Jessica leads students through another, this without the guitar but with rhythmic thigh slaps and later, simple dance steps in place:

The Earth is our mother,
we should take care of her.
The Earth is our mother,
we should take care…of her.
Heyanna hoyanna heyanna
Heyanna, hoyanna, heyanna

There is time for one more song, and a Bol, a student from Sudan, requests the "Hookie Hookie"—the Hokey Pokey. Jessica leads them through a rollicking, guitar-driven version of the song, and most of the students really get into it. Two students who normally do not interact with each other—Jamal of Afghanistan and Michael of the Sudan, come together and practically hug each other in the middle each time, or switch places across the circle. Sue tells me later that Jamal is often in conflict with the other students, but this is not apparent today.

After morning tea, Sue then has the students work on phoneme sounds in choral repetition: pa pe pi po pu, etc. Next, the students do a listening/spelling exercise where they must write the phoneme that they hear. Sue tells me later that she is impressed with how much better students do today, listening to and writing the correct phonemes, directly following the music lesson.

Artistic Expression and Healing

Adele Rice had told me that one of Milpera's chief goals is to address the social and psychological needs of children and youth, many of whom have been traumatized by war, famine, and the loss of loved ones. Art has been used not only to foster language development and intellectual growth, but also to help people in the healing process (Eisner, 2003; Samuels & Lane, 1998). Moreover, Dufault (2002) has utilized the visual arts in helping second language learners comprehend the moral teachings of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples.

One day I was able to witness the use of Aboriginal art forms in Jenny's Beginner One class. The day before the class had gone to see the Story Place exhibit of Aboriginal art at the museum in South Bank. Jenny has students work on addressing the envelopes they picked up at the exhibit. Students learn, write down, and practice asking and answering their names, addresses, suburbs, and postal codes.

After morning tea we relocate to the art/science room. There are several black tables with many outlets for gas, and three or four large sinks around the room. There are also art supplies on the back counter, and some student projects that combine visual arts, language arts, and science. There are student poems about nature on the back wall. One contains a drawing of colorful flowers gathered in a vase:

Flowers and leaves
Beautiful smells blowing wind
Nature dancing

Jenny tapes three posters of Aboriginal art on the board, and passes out booklets from the museum that contain some of the basic patterns used in the art. She says:

> To make these beautiful shapes takes a long time. You have one hour and fifteen minutes until lunch. Draw your picture first in pencil, then paint. Take your time.

She puts on a cassette of Aboriginal chanting, percussion, and didgeridoo. The young artists begin to draw their outlines in pencil on their large pieces of white paper. Later, they begin to apply the watercolors. Samira, of the Sudan, and the two Chinese girls draw intricate designs, with plants, serpents and other animals, with dot and line patterns.

Trang, a new student from Vietnam, draws a Rainbow Serpent with two other animals inside it. Deng, from the Sudan, struggles to stay focused, as he has all morning. However, his brother, who has already been reprimanded twice this morning, really gets into his painting after Jenny talks with him about improving on his initial piece.

Nuria, from Afghanistan, does a rendition of a piece of modern art called "Grass Burning." In vibrant colors, black, red, orange and blue, her piece of artwork comes alive, and one can almost feel the heat of the flames as they reach skyward. As I look at her work, I can feel the heat rising from a fire in Northern Australia—or is it a conflagration in war-torn Afghanistan, her homeland?

Transition to Regular High Schools

Riverside is one of the many schools to which Milpera students transfer to complete high school. Situated in a middle-class suburb about 20 minutes south of Brisbane by train, Riverside first began to experience a growth in its bilingual student population in the early 1990s. At that time, businesspeople from China and Taiwan were enticed to the proximity of the Gold Coast with its investment opportunities. Many purchased homes in Riverside and the children of these well-educated and well-to-do immigrants, not surprisingly, have done well in school. Of the 49% of students at Riverside who speak another language at home, Chinese-speakers make up the largest group.

In the mid-1990s a second wave of

students came, mostly refugees from the former Yugoslavia. Despite their lack of economic resources, these students have also done well in school, benefiting no doubt from a strong academic preparation in their countries of origin.

The current wave of refugee students arrives largely from Africa and the Middle East. As with their Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian classmates, these students have experienced the trauma of war, chaos, and forced movement. However, in post-September 11 Australia, they are more likely to stand out by nature of their skin color and nations of origin. Moreover, especially in the case of the students from Africa, they often lack formal educational experiences and literacy in any language. Thus, they present a very special challenge to the teachers at Riverside.

There have been many successes for students who have gone through the ESL program at Riverside: One is currently the top student of the school, the vast majority complete Year 12, and most get into a TAFE (technical college) or a university. However, is the school really prepared for the particular challenge of students, such as many of the Sudanese, who lack formal education and literacy skills?

State testing reveals that 75% of Riverside's ESL students continue to have problems in the area of reading comprehension. After an initial two weeks of ESL classes, most are placed in two or three periods each day of academic classrooms; by six months, most bilingual students are finished with the ESL program, except for a minor amount of ESL support in the mainstream classrooms. With students with low formal education and literacy backgrounds, this support will probably not be enough.

Themes in the Portrait of Milpera

The students who attend Milpera State High School are, by and large, refugees who have lived through a variety of traumatic experiences, and who continue to face serious challenges in adapting to Australia's predominantly white, English-speaking society. National and state commitment to providing services to immigrants and refugees has waned in Australia (Miller, 2003), a process that was underway before September 11 and the Bali bombings, but which has intensified since. Within such a context, how can a school, and a handful of educators, make a difference in the lives of newcomer students?

Three themes seem to run through this portrait of Milpera: The principal, teachers, and students are engaged in a critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003); literacy in English is enhanced through frequent real world experiences; and students' multiple intelligences—specifically in the areas of art and music—are developed to help them as they overcome trauma, adjust culturally, and learn a new language and academic content.

A Critical Pedagogy of Place

A critical pedagogy of place (Gruenewald, 2003) is unfolding at Milpera, wherein displaced youth from many countries are learning to live in a new environment, and where injurious and exploitative ideas are challenged and changed. The administrators and teachers with whom I spoke are aware of Australia's history of subjugation of native peoples and "White Australia" policies regarding immigration (Cahill, 2001). Acknowledgement of Australia's aboriginal peoples and its more recent immigrants from Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East are found in the art that adorns the hallways of the schools and in the intricate paintings on the school's sign.

The school hosts gatherings of Aboriginal peoples and visitors from Asia, and a monthly market attracts families of refugees. Student writing about their lives and refugee experiences adorn the walls outside classrooms. Field trips include visits to community centers where adults from all over Asia, Africa and the Middle East are able to pursue career training.

Adele Rice, Milpera's principal, works continually on behalf of students and their families, especially those who have become enmeshed in a post-911 web of asylum denials and deportation hearings. In classrooms, in school-wide activities, and through community field trips school personnel help to challenge powerful and injurious concepts about immigrants, while providing young people with space to shape their destinies as Australians.

Literacy Development

Literacy development was the focus of much of the learning I observed at Milpera, whether the subject was math, science, social studies, or language development. Jenny Miller utilized methods common with early childhood teachers, such as the language experience approach, to help students with the fundamentals of the literacy process. Ann helped students

focus on the phonemes of English, drawing on their oral and listening skills, in an effort to provide a base for further literacy development.

Both of these teachers used frequent experiences in the field—trips to art, science, and cultural exhibits, to nature reserves, and to places of historical and contemporary interest to provide students with a further context for reading and writing.

Multiple Intelligences

Finally, multiple intelligences, particularly musical and artistic intelligences, were drawn on to help students in cultural adjustment, and to develop socially and academically. The use of art, music, and movement at Milpera to support student learning of language and content is supported by earlier findings of Curtain and Haas (1995).

Music provided a means for students of diverse language and cultural backgrounds to literally come together—as they did while doing the hokey pokey. It also served as a bridge to further language development, including listening comprehension exercises. Performances outside of school, including at the Queensland Department of Education, served not only to build student self-esteem, but also to educate the wider community and policymakers about the Milpera program.

The visual arts served as a prompt for descriptive writing and further reading. Perhaps more importantly, taking the time to allow students to create their own works of art—as Jenny did—seems integral to the process of cultural and psychological adjustment for students who have faced, and continue to face, many challenges in their young lives.

Implications

One day at morning tea I had a good talk with Mario, a bilingual assistant at Milpera. He is a strongly built man of medium height, with dark hair and eyes, and brown, tanned skin. He came to Australia as a refugee 19 years ago from Chile. Because he took a day off from work on September 11, 1973, he was not at the presidential palace in Santiago when it was bombed in a CIA-sponsored coup, killing President Salvador Allende But Mario doesn't believe the coup was about Allende, saying, "it was about money." For him, the multinationals, especially in the copper industry, could not accept it that Chile, under Allende, should control its own natural resources.

When one considers the homelands of Milpera's refugee students, many questions regarding the role of foreign governments and multinational corporations could be asked: Is war tearing apart the Sudan so that oil from the south can be taken out cheaply? Is a market for "blood" diamonds fueling fratricidal conflicts in West Africa? Did Afghanistan need to be "pacified" just enough to allow the building of a natural gas pipeline to the West, and to expand the cultivation of opium? Is Iraq occupied so that its oil resources can be removed in a more expeditious manner? Does the War on Terror provide the necessary cover for the widespread despoiling of the Earth's resources, and the accompanying cultural destruction and displacement of peoples?

How can educators create safe havens for newcomers to develop new identities in lands of their diasporas? Just as importantly, how can ordinary people begin to challenge and change the injurious ideas that drive the forces that displace millions of men, women, and children?

To focus on teaching English and academic content, to prepare students to successfully enter regular high schools, and to assist them in pursuing higher education and careers, are necessary to the work of a newcomer high school. Yet, an understanding and a commitment to help others understand the roots of refugee situations needs to frame our educational practice, or we resign ourselves to a world where refugee crises are accepted as normal byproducts of doing business in the world.

The work at Milpera offers a glimpse of how educators and students can develop a critical pedagogy of place. Milpera offers a safe haven where young people overcoming trauma and separation can develop their identities in a new land. This critical narrative portrait of Milpera suggests ways in which other programs can better serve the needs of newcomer students:

Newcomers and their families need a variety of services beyond the traditional scope of schools: Social services, psychological services, healthcare, housing, inexpensive clothing and household goods, employment training, and citizenship classes are all necessities for many immigrants, especially refugees, who arrive with few or no material resources.

Newcomer students need to be encouraged in a variety of ways to develop literacy across academic content areas, and processes that work in early childhood settings—such as the language experience approach—seem to show promise when working with older students with who are developing emergent literacy.

Newcomers, and all students, would also benefit greatly from an infusion of the arts into the curriculum. The use of music, art, and movement at Milpera was impressive. Allowed to better develop their musical and artistic intelligences, students could find strengths that also supported their development in literacy and in other areas.

Teachers, administrators, and staff at schools that serve newcomers need to be provided with background on the nations of origin of their students, and the complex roles played by Western multinationals and governments in the refugee crisis. This, in turn, will help educators to become better advocates for the financial resources needed to make newcomer programs strong.

Educational policymakers in nations such as Australia and the United States need to seriously reassess their goals: Immigrants and refugees are often some of the strongest supporters of their nation of adoption. Most are grateful to find a refuge, and merely want access to the same opportunities as others.

Providing adequate funding for programs in ESL and bilingual education, professional training for all teachers, and fostering inclusive schools can only bode well for the future. In such a way, a generation of young people with cross-cultural and linguistic skills could move forward, to some day assist their nations of adoption with much needed skills in a world that values diplomacy and dialogue, not threats and preemptive war.

At the train station I meet Mahira, one of Sue's students from Afghanistan. She has bright brown eyes, dark eyebrows, and wears a brown headscarf and a beautiful smile. I feel a bit guilty with my half-eaten sandwich sitting between us, knowing that she is observing Ramadan, the holy month of fasting. She tells me that she has two brothers and two sisters, and that she has only been in Australia for three months.

When I think about my own struggle to get used to this country, despite a common language and much common culture, I think about how overwhelming all of this must be to Mahira from Kabul. She must learn a new language with odd rules and regulations. She is surrounded by a style of dress drastically different than her own, with fashion for young women involving a variety of hairstyles, piercings, and exposed midriffs. She adheres to a religion that has been demonized in the West, and refugees from Muslim countries have seen some of the worst of the detention centers of her nation of adoption (Rintoul, 2003).

Despite it all, she seems happy. For Mahira and others like her, there is a school like Milpera, even if she must spend an hour by bus and train each day to reach there. There is at least one place in this big, busy

city that is "a meeting place for brothers and sisters . . . a meeting place for us."

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