

My task this afternoon is to talk about the structure of the Refugee Action Support Program, herein referred to as RAS. RAS began in 2007 as a community engagement option for secondary pre-service teachers interested in tutoring young African refugee students in literacy and numeracy support in four after-school homework centres, located in the western Sydney region. This pilot program expanded in 2008 to include nine high schools across two disadvantaged metropolitan Sydney regions with high refugee populations. Schools in Western Sydney and South Western Sydney are selected via an expression of interest to their regional equity coordinator.

The tutors who provide the support are enrolled at the University of Western Sydney, Master of Teaching (Secondary) degree. RAS is part of their community-based practicum known as *Professional Experience 3* (PE 3). The latter is a community based practicum program comprising sixty hours of community engagement that gives pre-service Master of Teaching students the opportunity to develop their understanding of the individual needs of school-age students they meet and the chance to work alongside and learn from the expertise of classroom teachers, mentors and community liaison officers. This practicum also emphasizes reflective practice - reflection facilitates the connection between practice and theory and fosters critical self-reflection so that pre-service teachers gain a range of different perspectives on school students and educational issues in Sydney's greater western region.

The nine schools participating in the program offer a teaching practicum placement to each UWS tutor. As the four weeks of practicum overlap with the twelve weeks of mentoring, it is necessary that the teacher education students undertake these two practicum experiences at the same school. While the focus of these traditional placements is to provide experience to pre-service teachers in the art and the mechanics of teaching, and for them to gain some understanding of the daily functions of schools, the tutoring assists UWS secondary education students to develop the skills and understandings to support the learning of refugee students in schools. The tutoring is provided by two cohorts of tutors in two twelve week blocks over the year. Tutoring is also provided once a week on Thursdays, for three hours, starting after lunchtime and continuing for two hours after school. Each Centre was to ideally allow between two or three students to each tutor and tutors are assigned to schools in teams of three or four.

Before starting the tutoring program the university student tutors receive training in explicit language and literacy teaching from both the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation and UWS. The ALNF also provide ongoing support to tutors through online access to resources and support. The online resource has a discussion forum, downloadable resources, links to literacy support material and online

activities. During 2009 the training was expanded to include ESL scales, as requested by the tutors. It is envisaged that having this input will provide tutors with greater skills and knowledge in analysing students' abilities and learning needs. Through the initiative, UWS students, after completing eighteen hours of intensive training on cultural orientation and literacy development, provide tutoring to small groups of refugee students. So the training focuses on small group instruction; explicit language; scaffold literacy teaching; ESL scales; deconstruction, analysis and creation of resources.

Tutors spend an hour and a half on face-to-face tutoring and another hour either assisting students in class; working with a small group of students outside the classroom (e.g. in a learning centre or library); working individually with students outside the classroom; creating teaching and learning resources (e.g. scaffolds) to assist students' engagement in learning and tasks or observing classroom lessons so as to prepare for after-school support. The last half hour is a debriefing session with the teacher coordinator where the tutors can discuss the progress of the students in the tutoring program and any emerging issues. Each participating school nominates a teacher coordinator to oversee the program in the school, including overseeing after school tutorials. Teacher coordinators are also responsible for liaising with UWS practicum coordinator in relation to the PE1 or PE2 placements; coordinating and attending all tutorial sessions in their school; monitoring and keeping records of attendance; supervising and supporting the tutors in their work with the refugee students; communicating with parents and caregivers and participating in an evaluation of the program. As part of the initiative, a Community Liaison Officer (CLO) is also employed part time to assist participating schools improve their links with refugee communities. The CLO is responsible for providing bilingual and bicultural support to tutors and school coordinators as negotiated; assisting in communicating with students and parents / caregivers; providing tutors with cultural awareness training and participating in an evaluation of the program.

The program therefore supports high school refugee students to improve their English language and literacy skills; develop their understanding and achievement of requirements in particular subject areas and develop the confidence to participate in the classroom. To date 216 refugee students who attend regularly have received support through the program. The program also assists UWS tutors ease the transition from small scale tutoring to formal school professional practice; develop an awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences and understand that treating all students the same way is often inappropriate and ineffective; and helps pre-service teachers understand the limitations of whole-class instruction and the importance of one-on-one tutoring and mentoring for students who have special educational needs.

The Refugee Action Support Program makes a valuable contribution to knowledge about teacher education. The model has been taken up by Charles Stuart University and other universities are looking at the possibilities of adopting the model. Refugee Support groups in the country have also expressed an interest in the program. So, the program does not only try to understand and document the participants' pedagogical approaches to refugee education, it also demonstrates an increasing awareness of teachers' experiences of social and cultural diversity issues in schools and classrooms.

