



Understanding the barriers to learning for students from a refugee background (SRB): Emergent themes from Year 9 transition experiences
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An Overview

- The context for the research
- CCL's approach to grounded theory
- Exploring relationships within the data
- Developing a set of hypotheses and emerging theory
- The next stages

Background

- Literature review completed in 2006 on achievement of SRB in secondary school
- Longitudinal study commissioned by MoE in 2007 to answer the following questions:
 1. What are the achievement patterns/trends of refugee students in New Zealand secondary schools?
 2. What factors (relating to family, school and the students themselves) help explain achievement patterns found?
 3. What gaps, if any, are there in the provisions made for students and what changes of support are needed to enhance their achievement?
- Annual case studies to inform/give meaning to emergent themes
- Purpose of this year: *How have potential barriers to learning for SRB been identified and addressed in Year 9?*

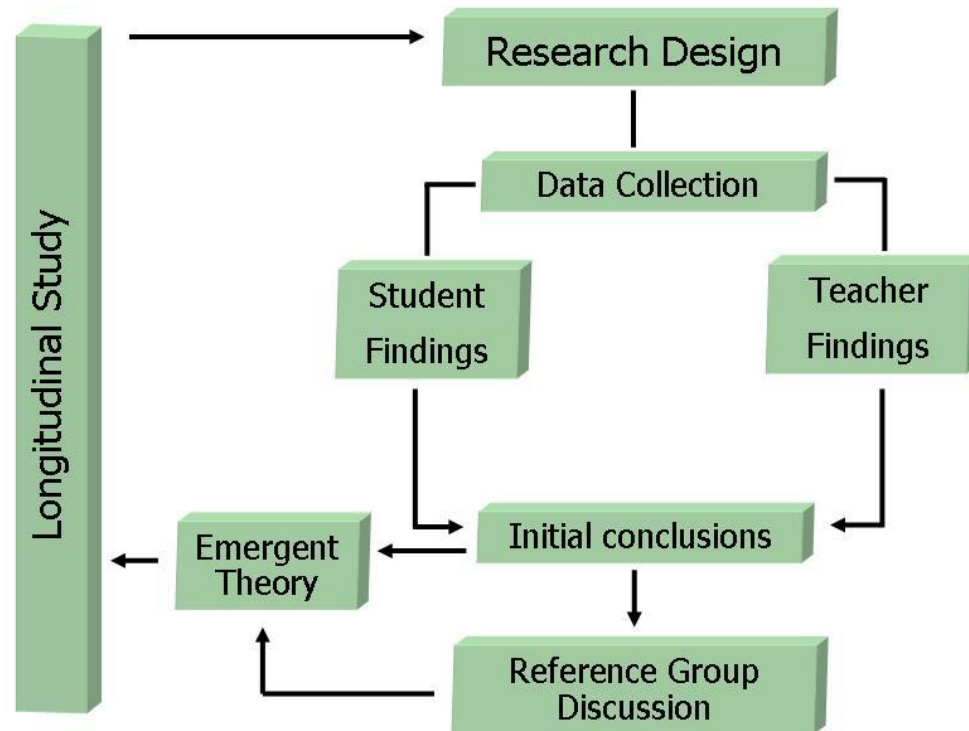
Research Questions

- Informed by literature review
- 15 questions grouped into five areas
 - Student induction
 - Family-school interaction
 - Student achievement
 - Support of student achievement and social needs
 - Student relationships and participation in school activities

Case Study Participants

- Six case study schools
 - Three schools with higher %'s of SRBs and three with lower %'s
- 29 teachers across the schools in a variety of roles interviewed individually
- 21 students interviewed in focus groups
 - Majority coming from Africa or Middle East
 - Over 90% in New Zealand for two years or more
 - Over 90% had been in at least two schools in New Zealand
 - Majority had less than 4 years of formal schooling abroad
- All data self-reported

Grounded Theory Design



Exploring relationships

School induction and support practices

- This years' cohort of SRB had no or standard transitions issues according to school staff
 - Most students coming from other schools, not new to New Zealand
 - Perceptions varied by role
- Most schools had induction and support practices in place for SRB and families
 - Variance by roles in recognition of what school practices were
 - Students, on the whole mentioned practices that are in place for all Year Nine students
 - Many students didn't acknowledge ongoing supports as there specifically for them
- Size of school not as important as strong coordinator and history of working with SRB

Student achievement

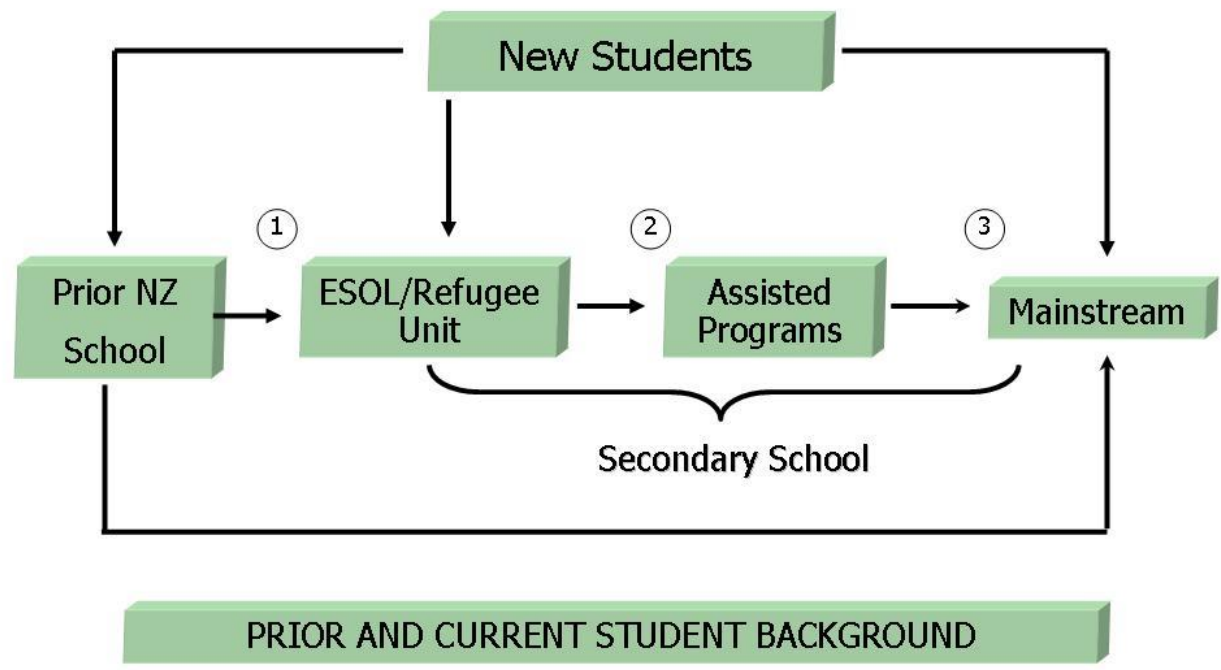
- Importance of schools/teachers being responsive to SRB needs identified by both teachers and students
 - Teachers outside ESOL/refugee unit recognise this less
 - Students identified unsupportive teachers, mainly outside ESOL/refugee unit as a strong barrier
- Three top barriers to SRB achievement according to teachers:
 - Student capability
 - Literacy
 - Systems knowledge
- Varying levels of awareness about home support/life as a barrier
- Parental expectations seen as unrealistic at present, influencing students' perceptions of present capability

Student relationships and participation in school life

- Peers, in eyes of students a critical facet of learning support in Year 9
- Friends, identified by both staff and students, mainly those of a similar background to them
- Key differences
 - Perceptions vary by teacher role
 - Schools with smaller %'s vs. larger %'s of SRB
- Students not taking part in life of school
 - Culture, financial considerations, out of school responsibilities all factors
 - Boys mixing through sport

Hypotheses and emergent theory

Multiple transitions



Forms of isolation

- Both group and individual isolation have the potential to be both positive and negative experiences
 - Individual isolation
 - Less access to academic and programmatic support in mainstream environment
 - Engagement with diverse student populations necessary
 - Group isolation
 - Access to supports for learning identified by SRB
 - Engagement with others a choice
 - Reinforcement of negative behaviour and attitudes

Acculturation

- Acculturation a shifting continuum rather than a process
- Acculturation influenced by a number of factors
 - Schools with high % SRB vs. lower % SRB
 - Participation in school life
 - ESOL versus mainstream classroom environment
 - Student choice
- Continued dilemma of acculturation being an additive process

Ideas of capability and capacity

- Family perceptions influenced by knowledge of student capacity
- Teacher perceptions influenced by assumptions that current capability is a reflection of capacity, particularly for some teachers in mainstream
- SRB in mainstream may have unrealistic expectations at present and may not want to be singled out as “different” or in need of help

The Next Steps

- Testing of emergent themes and hypothesis with student achievement data and student surveys
- Utilisation of future case study interviews to further “unpack” these ideas
- Development of new qualitative tools to provide additional student voice
- Collaboration and consultation with other research being done on the subject