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Settling in: The relationship between information and social inclusion

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Abstract

Social exclusion is a process that directly reduces people's capacity to participate in society. An important factor that contributes to social exclusion is the inability to recognize or understand important sources of information that facilitate social inclusion and participation. Social inclusion requires an ability to develop effective information practices that enable connection to compliance, everyday and nuanced information that constitute elements of the information landscape which need to be accessed and understood in order to participate in their adopted community. For refugees who are newly arrived and establishing themselves in Australia, the information landscape appears unfamiliar, complex and difficult to navigate. To enable them to settle in Australia, new information practices may be required to enable them to find and interpret information, resolve problems, and deal with everyday situations which enable social inclusion and prevent social exclusion. This paper reports the findings of a project that focused on information and its relationship to social inclusion in three phases of settling in (*transitioning*, *settling in*, and *being settled*) to a new community in a regional city of NSW.

Introduction

For new settlers[1] who are establishing themselves in Australia, the information landscape is often unfamiliar, complex, and difficult to navigate. To successfully connect, settlers are required to develop new information practices that enable them to find and interpret information in order to meet the formal requirements of their residency and to deal with everyday situations that may be very different from their previous situations. To assist settlers in navigating their new information landscape, a collaborative approach is required, with settlers, communities, and service providers working together. To participate in their new communities in informed and productive ways, settlers require access to information and the technologies used to access, disseminate, and use information. The information practices required for participation in Australia may be quite different from those used by settlers prior to arrival in Australia. We argue that without the ability to access the Australian information landscape, settlers may become socially excluded.

To better understand the role of information in social inclusion and exclusion, a study was undertaken in 2010. The study reported here focuses on the information experiences faced by newly arrived and longer term settlers in a regional location as they learn to engage and participate in social, educational, and workplace spheres of their adopted community. An additional aim was to provide some insights into how settlers experience their new information landscape in order to connect and situate themselves. Finally, the study aimed to provide insight into and understanding about the work of service providers and community educators in meeting settler information needs. The findings of this study have the potential to inform policy for government agencies working with settlers, particularly refugees. Furthermore the research contributes to the practice of a range of service providers, for example libraries and government agencies, who gain an insight into the needs of an under-served community.

This paper summarises key elements of the literature and presents the methods used in the study. An overview and discussion of the preliminary findings is also presented, leading to a discussion on future research about social exclusion and inclusion from an information perspective.

Literature

In his review of the corpus of literature on social inclusion and exclusion, Vinson (2009) finds that all definitions of exclusion include a "lack of connectedness" and reflect "the many sided nature of exclusion as well as the fact the social and physical environments in which

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[1] The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) has specific definitions for the terms migrant, refugee and resident. Technically a migrant is defined as a person who was born overseas and has obtained permanent Australian resident status prior to or after their arrival. A permanent resident is defined as a person who was born overseas and has obtained permanent Australian resident status prior to or after their arrival. A refugee is a person who is subject to persecution in their home country and who is in need of resettlement. In other publications the ABS uses the term "settler" to apply to all these categories and we follow their precedence for this paper. http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3415.0Glossary12008?OpenDocument

people live are implicated" (p. 12). The risks of exclusion for the individual are identified by Vinson (2009) as "limited support networks, inability to access the labour market, alienation from society and poorer educational outcomes" which can lead to further risk of disenfranchisement (p. 7). As a whole of community issue, Warschauer (2002; 2004) suggests that social exclusion hurts not only those who are excluded but also the broader community and the economy.

The literature related to immigrant's integration into new societies indicates that the need for information and the ability to understand how information is situated and made accessible is a primary driver for successful participation. Caidi and Allard (2005) suggest that settlers face substantial information problems, in the first instance relating to the navigation of information related to basic needs such as housing, employment, education, and health. Other studies (George & Chaze, 2009) also find that information is the most critical need of new settlers and otherwise note a strong relationship between social exclusion and information (Aspinall, 2007; Bigelow, 2010; Colic-Peisker, 2005).

The idea that limited access to information restricts the capacity of individuals to fully participate in society and to make informed decisions has been seen as driver for what has been termed *information poverty*. The information poor constitute a group that is shaped by economic and social exclusion and whose knowledge is generated at the periphery of society (Chatman, 1996). Settlers, who often have different understandings of society because the world that they have previously inhabited has been very different to the new world of their adopted countries, may experience information poverty (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Mehra, Allard, Qayyum, & Barclay-McLaughlin, 2008). Over time information poverty can affect the ability to extend social networks, to gain employment, maintain health, and to improve educationally, thus creating a cycle of alienation, continued marginalisation, and disenfranchisement for this sector of the community (Lloyd, Lipu, & Kennan 2010).

A Canadian study (Caidi & Allard, 2005) examining the social inclusion and exclusion of immigrants in Canada suggests that a lack of access to information creates barriers that prohibit settlers' full participation in education, work, and every-day life. This may result in those without access to information becoming increasingly excluded from mainstream information sources and subsequently failing to develop the capacity to fully settle, to take up opportunities and participate actively in society. Thus social exclusion is conceptualised as an information problem. A lack of access to information is seen by George and Chaze (2009) to contribute to loneliness and stress and a feeling of social exclusion, influenced by an inability to find work, and loss of social support immigrants experienced in their home country.

The literature indicates a need to address options for information access, information provision, and information education in culturally appropriate ways, which acknowledges cultural difference and provides for those not literate in English who may not have access to, or understanding of information and communication technology (ICT) (Chow, 2010; Hancock, 2009). Much of the literature also emphasises the importance of service providers working together to assist the social inclusion of settlers (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Caidi, Allard,

& Quirke, 2010). Increased understanding of settler information needs is particularly relevant for Australian regional and rural areas and regional libraries where settlers are less likely to have established communities of their own language and cultural groups to support them, and where they are settled in communities previously more culturally homogenous than large cities.

Settlers may have had different information practices and requirements in their former countries to those they must now develop in order to navigate the information environment of their new communities and this may impact on their transition into their newly adopted society (Allard, Mehra, & Qayyum, 2007; Caidi & Allard, 2005; Hancock, 2009). Information overload can also result in a sense of social exclusion. Hancock (2009) has noted that new African settlers were given an "overwhelming 'saturation' of information upon arrival" but after six months much of this information had been forgotten (p. 14).

To better understand the role of information in social exclusion and inclusion for new settlers, this study has been undertaken comprising service providers, researchers and settlers working together as co-participants to: 1) understand the information experiences of new settlers as they adapt to a regional location; 2) understand how settlers develop their information practice in order to connect and situate themselves; and 3) provide insight into and understanding about the work of information service providers and community educators in meeting settler information needs.

Method

In this study, the researchers adopted a socio-cultural approach to qualitatively exploring settlers' information experiences and practices and how these experiences and practices contribute to social inclusion. Socio-cultural approaches emphasise that all practices are socially constructed and mediated producing a shared understanding between people who are co-located (Brown & Duguid, 2001).

In phase one**,** a steering committee comprising the researchers and six representative members from the Public Library (the library), local settler groups, and the Multicultural Council (MC) of a regional city was formed to act as a consultative committee. This committee oversaw the various phases of the study and provided advice in relation to the objectives and outcomes of the study. Member organisations of the Steering Committee also provided assistance to the research team in terms of organizing and providing meeting and interview rooms, transcription and translation services, and introductions to potential interviewees.

Phase two focused on data collection from the Settler Group (SG) and Service Providers Group (SPG). Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants were given an explanation of the aims of the study, with interpreters where necessary, prior to signing their consent forms. SG interviewees were a purposive sample of adults, a range of arrival methods (students, family reunion and refugees) and from the main groups of settlers in the region; Africans, Burmese and Chinese. SPG interviewees were also a purposive sample from the MC, CentaCare (a Catholic community services organization which provides services

without regard to religion, race, culture, or economic circumstance), the library, and a large employer of settlers. For the SG the sample size was 10 people, and for the SPG, 5 people. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured in-depth interview schedule (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). Interviews lasted between 35-40 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. Three categories of settler participants formed the purposive sample. The first category were new settlers who had been in Australia 0 to 6 months, the second group were settlers who had been Australia from 12 months to 2 years, and the third group was comprised of longer-term settlers. Of the settlers, three came as students (S1, S2, & S3), one on the family reunion scheme (F1), and six as refugees (R1-R6). The sample was intended to obtain a range of views about the Australian information environment and to attempt to identify issues that characterize the difficulties of settlers experience at different times.

Interview data for the SPG group was collected from representatives of service provider agencies such as the library, the MC, community support organisations such as CentaCare, and employers. The sample size for this group was five participants (SP1-SP5). Representatives from these organizations also participated in semi-structured interviews. This phase enabled the researchers to compare the experiences of settler participants with the expectations and understandings of service providers.

Data were also collected by staff from the library and the MC who were encouraged to keep research diaries recording information requests from settlers and the type of assistance provided by staff. They also recorded their reflections about these transactions. The information gathered assisted in understanding and describing the context of the information experience for settlers.

In phase three, two focus groups comprised of interviewees selected by the researchers --one for each of the SGs (total of 5 participants) and for the SPG (also 5 participants)-- were held to discuss the analysis of phase two. The focus groups explored the themes and perspectives emerging from the analysis of the interviews and considered ways in which information production and delivery can be developed to meet the specific information needs of settlers within the community.

Data analysis was influenced by the qualitative constructivist grounded theory approach of Charmaz (2003) insofar as every effort is made to present the viewpoint of participants. Initially, each of the researchers separately coded the data to establish themes, after which the team met collectively several times to conduct more detailed development of themes. The findings of the interview phase shaped the focus group questions for SG and SPG groups.

Analysis of both the interviews and the focus groups has resulted in the findings reported below.

Findings

The findings of the study suggest that new settlers move through three phases identified as *transitioning*, *settling in,* and *being settled*. These phases are not necessarily sequential; rather

they are cyclical and iterative. The information experiences of settlers varies in each phase, and settlers move from one phase to another as they develop their Australian information practice and they become more connected and included in their new information landscape. Furthermore, it appears that the length of time in each phase and the number of returns to earlier phases are also dependent on the manner of arrival and settlers' educational background prior to arrival. In analysing the results of the study it became clear that the information landscape was a much more complex issue for refugee settlers than for settlers of other types. The following findings illustrate the information experiences of new settlers in the different phases of settlement, explain how they develop information practices which enable them to move from phase to phase, and provide insight into the role of service providers as mediators and navigators.

Transitioning

Transitioning begins before settlers arrive, when they are seeking or being given information about their new country. The findings from the study indicate that this phase is more prolonged and difficult for settlers who have little English skill or low levels of formal education, and who in the study sample came to Australia as refugees. The information landscape for the refugee settlers is different, and highly specialised, formed through a complex array of organizational services which frame the legislative and humanitarian requirements for settlement. Refugee settlers who enter Australia mostly do so through two programs. The first is the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS) which provides initial, intensive settlement support to newly-arrived humanitarian entrants for six months. This support includes an assessment by IHSS service[2] providers to identify settlement needs, and delivery of services to meet these needs in a coordinated way. Typical services offered under the IHSS are:

- Case Coordination, Information, and Referrals

- Arrival Reception and Assistance

- Accommodation Services

- Short Term Torture and Trauma Counselling Services

The second program is the Settlement Grants Program (SGP), which provides funding to assist humanitarian entrants and migrants in settling in Australia and participating in Australian society as soon as possible after arrival. A settler client normally seeks assistance from a SGP service provider after they have exited from the IHSS program. The SGP funds projects that deliver settlement services such as further orientation to Australia, developing

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[2] Since this study was completed the IHSS has changed its name to the HSS. For further information on the HSS see http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66hss.htm and the SGP see http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/92funding.htm. Other programs are available through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, but the above two are the programs referred to by both the service provider and refugee participants in the pilot interviews.

communities, and integration. Refugees can be a part of the SGP from six months to five years. SGP involves less intensive case management, than the IHSS with more of a focus on information sessions and workshops. There is also a focus in the SGP on the communities in which the settlers arrive, to increase knowledge within the community of the needs of settlers, to try and ensure that these needs are met effectively. The six refugee settlers in the pilot program had arrived under the IHSS and been beneficiaries of the program which links new arrivals with caseworkers and volunteers. All had moved on to the SGP.

Arriving and establishing information relationships
The arrival of new refugees initiates a range of information related activities, where orientation information is shared between service providers and the new arrivals. In this initial phase a close and dependent working relationship is established between new arrivals and the caseworkers and volunteers who introduce new arrivals to their new information landscape. Caseworkers constitute a primary information source, particularly in relation to compliance information, that is information related to the rules and regulations of the society in general and community in particular. With volunteers, caseworkers also act as a critical source for informal everyday information, such as how ATMs and telephones and necessary administrative processes work; where to buy food and clothing; which community services are available; which suburbs are the most suitable to live in, and so on. A service provider who is involved in the IHSS program describes processes involved in orientation of new settlers and assumptions that service providers make about what information is required:

> *… [the] caseworker is a vital information source really so they become quite attached to them … – it's constant, the case workers work daily with them.* (SP2)

In the early stages of arrival, the information landscape is mapped out for new settlers, who may have little understanding of what information is necessary for successful transition, how to begin the process of settling in, how to access the information they need, or even how to describe their specific information needs. Service providers draw from their previous experience, recognizing how overwhelming the experience of transition and arrival can be for refugees, and the real and constant barriers created by language and literacy difficulties. Both refugees and service providers recognise the enormity of the challenges posed for new arrivals. Many everyday tasks easy for those born in Australia or for native English speakers to accomplish present enormous challenges for refugees:

> *… within a fortnight a letter from Centrelink[3]. "You need to do this" – "You need to do that." Devastating!* (R5)

> *...basic stuff … the housing, the employment, the income, the education … [some] won't even understand money.* (SP3)

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[3] Centrelink is an Australian Government statutory agency, delivering a range of Commonwealth services to the Australian community, including social security payments such as age and disability pensions and job seekers allowances and training (http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/home/index.htm).

> *…I think it is generally an overwhelming process…the main barrier tends to be language. ... I think most of our people who come initially in the first six months - what they're after and what they seem to be most in need for is information how to readily just safely and efficiently settle in their house ... Like knowing how to have a house over their head, knowing a bit about what transport options are available....* (SP2)

Based on experience, service providers anticipate settler information needs and navigate the settlers through the information landscape and towards the appropriate information sources. They provide information to mediate the information environment on new settlers' behalf.

As refugees move into their own houses and the community, their information relationships change and become extended. They move from complete reliance on their caseworkers and volunteers and into establishing their own information relationships with Centrelink, neighbours, estate agents, medical officers, and employment agencies. During this phase refugees must learn to engage with a broader and more complex information landscape, whilst also dealing with language and literacy barriers. The process of transition is incremental, complex, and circular. As refugees become more familiar with some aspects of the information landscape, the sources available to them, and the activities and skills required for access, they also begin to develop different needs for information, often with a greater level of complexity.

Navigating the information landscape

Service providers have a mediational role and are seen by refugees to be authoritative information resources. Service providers take on the role of navigators assisting refugees with compliance requirements and assisting with mapping of formal information sources. An intense relationship is created between the two groups. Refugees recognise their lack of experience in their new information landscape, and their inability to evaluate either the information or the sources provided. Several participants mentioned that they sometimes get conflicting information or information they do not understand. Refugees turn to service providers for clarification and guidance. As one refugee articulated:

> *The Multicultural Council is showing me what is true…. (R2)*

Dealing with nuances of a new culture

Settlers' previous experience and understanding of how information is provided and accessed can become a source of tension once they enter a new information landscape. In any community there exists taken-for-granted information (the conventions related to daily living). Settlers, particularly refugee settlers, may have limited experience of a western daily life. Taken-for-granted information reflects tacit information that people know from growing up in or inhabiting an information landscape. This type of information can be critical, but not easily perceived. Several service providers gave examples of this type of information: what to wear to a real estate agent or job interview; that one's interview wardrobe may be different for different kinds of jobs; how food at eye height in supermarkets is more expensive; that hanging clothes over heaters is a fire hazard; that power for heating is very expensive.

Service providers also recognize that within the broader community there exists a lack of cultural awareness of the difficulties refugees face, which can create barriers to information access. This is particularly evident with everyday information. In this respect, caseworkers attempt to form a bridge where by the information that is provided is then demonstrated. One service provider illustrates

> *... like I'll take a client to the local supermarket, and the butcher and the chemist, and just sort of say to the chemist, oh this is my friend, blah-blah, they've actually just recently moved here, they don't speak English very well, but they'll be coming up here to, maybe do their shopping, and you just try to connect them with [the community],* (SP3)

In summary, the transition stage of settlement is fraught with tensions because of the many intricate webs of information with which a settler must connect. Refugees view this stage as overwhelming in terms of information overload and the need to develop information practices that will effectively enable them to learn to navigate their new information landscapes. Case workers, volunteers, and other community based service providers play a primary role as mediators and navigators in the first six months of settlement, and through this role they begin to enable the process of capacity building, enabling refugees to develop an understanding of the social environment and its associated information landscapes.

At this stage, information practices necessary to engage with a complex and multimodal society are introduced to refugees who learn by observing and listening to mediators as they navigate the environment. Refugee participants in the research study had limited spoken or written English skills and so the preferred information practices were those that centre on oral communication and information sharing.

Settling in

After the first six months, refugee participants move from the intensive support of the IHSS into the SGP. While some still require the support of service providers to navigate the information landscape, most are becoming oriented and are more likely to be proactive, extending their search for information sources and support beyond that which is available from the initial service providers who have assisted them during the transition phase.

Mediation of the information landscape by service providers and support workers continues once new settlers move into the SGP, although case worker have less time for each family or person and refugees are encouraged to be more independent. Even though settlers learn more about their information environment, it remains complex and uncertain. For example:

> *I don't know if you guys have ever had to deal with Centrelink? Centrelink is quite a complicated process... So, we'll have people that have been here for three or four years still bringing letters from Centrelink saying I don't know what they're asking me, because they're not clear cut, they're not saying you can do this, you can do that, and often they'll get several of the same letter sent out, because of how Centrelink systems work, and so on.* (SP3)

A refugee settler expresses a common sentiment about the importance of mediators:

> *….a good thing is when ever things happen to me and I can't find anything, the first thing I run into this [MC] office so whoever I lay my hands on will help me get through it.* (R5 in Australia 4 years +)

In the process of settling in, new settlers take up educational opportunities, especially language and sometimes other courses offered by TAFE or community training centres. Some have progressed through tertiary preparation courses to gain entry to the local university, taking up opportunities for work and community activities. For all settlers who participated in the study, there was a clear relationship between education, English language proficiency, and information access and use. One refugee reported how his English skills prevented him getting work:

> *somebody say oh sorry, you are not enough in English, you can't get in a builder, builder is a very danger, you know we have a qualification ...* (R4)

Another refugee comments about how his English enables him to communicate and use information:

> *I've learnt a lot ... if you look at the amount of English I know when I can defend myself, I can write a letter… that gives me the edge to communicate better with some people outside ... the [country] community.* (R5)

He later compares himself to his wife who is not educated and does not speak English:

> *... like for example my wife never been to school so sometimes I sit and think if she hasn't got somebody like me how would she survive?* (R5)

While still reliant on caseworkers and volunteers, this group has become more familiar with the information landscape and have developed tools that will allow them to quickly identify new navigators who are appropriate to assist with the problem or issue. They are also aware of emerging information needs and more able to identify appropriate sources that will allow them to satisfy these needs.

Over time new arrivals begin to become familiar with the tacit cues within the information landscape which are often disseminated as word of mouth, and through social networks. For example in relation to work, many settlers indicated that they understand that it is *who you know* that may be useful in securing employment and that non-formal means (e.g., outside the agency) are often better ways of obtaining a job. However, some refugees feel excluded from these informal channels:

> *That's only them, we can't read, we can't writing then we are not…the people talking and we don't know how…they are hiding a lot of … they just talk and we don't know….* (R4)

An additional issue that emerged in the study are the particular difficulties facing settlers in regional locations. For example, settlers may not find people of their own language group and culture, whereas in the capital cities there are more likely to be people from all over the world. One settler talks about having to go out and get his own information. When asked if he consulted people from the African community he said:

> *Well when I first arrived there was no [African community] … but along the line things happen and then they form a group.* (R5)

Several participants reported that that until they arrived they did not know they would be coming to a regional location and expressed disappointment. They had assumed they would be in Sydney, where there are big communities from their country of origin. They hope to get work with people who speak the same language and can interpret for them as they learn the information landscape, but this opportunity is not available to them in the regions.

> *It's really sad, because when I left Africa, I was told that I'm going to Australia, not that I was going to [place]. It was a shock, it was disappointing to see that when I go to Sydney airport I was taken to [place]… because my wish was to work for[name] … who speaks my language, so that I could be able to communicate with him, he could tell me something and I would understand what he tells me, without any problems.* (R6)

Where available, friends and the community are used for things related to everyday activities for example shopping, educational and medical information; however, with compliance matters refugees recognise that their peers do not often have the correct information and therefore are not considered to be an authoritative information source. One participant when asked if he would seek information from other members of the [nationality] community said he would not:

> *…not from [nationality] people, the reason--we are poor … the same, like me.* (R4)

A number of service providers who participated in the study, recognised the complexity of the information pathways of their own services, in particular the assumptions that are made about settlers' ability to recognize and then access relevant information when that information provided is not in their own language. An interviewee from the library recognizes this in relation to the public availability of information via the library website and library owned resources and identifies the importance of volunteers' families in helping refugees become familiar with information and library based information access practices within this setting:

> *… When people first come to [place] they often come in as a new settler with their families that's helping them, ... I think the sort of skills that they need would be they would have to be literate in their own language to even understand what's happening here, [and] if you don't know the language, it's useless.* (SP1)

Settlers, who have already been introduced to the library as part of their orientation, begin to recognize the library as a resource, for themselves and their children, and as a safe space to meet others. Community members and community based organizations are also mapped into the settlers' landscape as they engage in everyday living. Community members act as points of reference for recent arrivals providing an informal source of information, based on their own experiences. During this study, library staff in their diaries observed that younger settlers are gaining or have developed proficiency in computer use and are active using the library's computers. Younger refugees are reported by all service providers as acting as a reference point for other refugees in relation to government websites and compliance knowledge.

Being settled

In the study, settled participants demonstrated their understanding of the information landscape and were reflective of their experiences in the previous phases of settlement. This group had developed knowledge of the information landscape and had constructed a complex internal map, which they readily passed on to others. They view the sharing of information as a form of capacity building, which strengthens not only the individual but also the community by increasing the ability of settlers to participate in community life. Some of the settlers in this group had arrived as students and stayed on, or came under the family reunion scheme. Their experience of the transition and settling in phases were somewhat different to the refugees. Usually well-educated, and often with existing English language skills, they quickly mastered the Australian information landscape. Refugee settlers who had reached this phase also demonstrated an awareness of the circular and incremental process of settling as they continued to encounter new situations.

Established settlers are more aware of their information needs, are self sufficient and increasingly confident in their ability to find information and to evaluate a variety of information sources to ensure their information needs are met. They are more likely to act as reference points to other member of their community, by alerting them to issues or passing on relevant information. They, in turn, are more likely to identify social sources as the primary starting point for their own information searching and are able to mobilize these sources on demand as a result of the social capital they have built. For example, one participant who had a university education described the different elements of her information landscape:

> It's a broad question, it depends on what field. Let's say if I need…banking help, I might just ring friends in the bank, but if I do some job research, I might just ring my Home Stay mother [the person who supported the participant when she first arrived as a student], she used to help me, give a bit of advice because she was a teacher, and if I need any other information, maybe purchase a house, I might ring my colleague's husband, he's a real estate broker, so it depends on the field I need help. (S3)

Participants become increasingly confident and competent evaluating sources of information and begin to act as a reference point for others. As one explains:

> *I'm the first authority. …he will forward my suggestion or anything to his colleagues such as now is tax season ... he would spread all the information through the community.* (S3)

Having established themselves within the community, the settled also reflect on the kinds of information sources that may be useful for new settlers indicating an awareness of the information landscape, beyond their own immediate needs.

Discussion

One of the central aims of this study was to better understand the information practices of these settler groups and their service providers to determine whether settler information practices keep them from full social inclusion or whether the settling process helps them avoid social exclusion, and what sorts of information practice training might be necessary to encourage higher levels of social inclusion. The above findings reflect there are changes in information practices endemic to the settling process. The following discussion further explores the findings in terms of information type and processes.

Learning to map the landscape
During the study, specific types of information were identified as being critical to the transition and settling-in phases. These we construct as compliance information and everyday information. Compliance information refers to that information related to the instrumental and organizing discourses of society. This type of information can be described as explicit and rules-based and is derived from sources such as government policy, regulations, and the law. Everyday information, on the other hand, is related to everyday needs such as education, employment, health, daily living, and the need to contact family and friends. Much everyday information is nuanced and based in convention and may be understood as implicit or tacit knowledge.

Developing Compliance Information
Settlers, in their first few months, enter the new information environment as receivers of information. Their initial information practices are focused on compliance and initiation into the landscape. A primary aim of the first few months is to ensure that settlers engage with and develop an understanding of the rules and regulations of the wider society and to their new community and as such, information tends to be disseminated textually at this stage. A service provider described the difficulty that textual information presents many settlers and the frustration it causes service providers who much comply with their legislative responsibilities:

> *…there's not much point handing out written pieces of information if you actually don't know how it is going to be received...* (SP1)

In their mediational role, service providers give meaning to compliance information by mapping it against societal norms and values, thus enabling new refugees to begin the process of building a knowledge base that will orchestrate their activities and keep them safe within

the legal system. A common theme amongst the participants was expressed in the following way:

> *Because if they [MC] are not, have not, been there, I will be, maybe I will be in jail.* (R4)

People who work closely with new arrivals have considered deeply what compliance information is necessary for new arrivals, and dissemination is targeted to ensure that this information is presented in a meaningful way that allows new settlers to make connections. As one stated:

> *…my role is running information sessions and things like that which target around mainly pretty important things that our clients need. So it could be information sessions around tenancy, it could be fire awareness in the home, to taxation, to money management and all sorts of things.* (SP2)

Understanding the compliance process is marked by an acceptance of information and refugee settlers work closely with, and are reliant on, caseworkers who assist them in navigating the system.

Everyday information

In addition to mediating compliance information, service providers and community volunteers assist refugees in mapping the everyday living terrain. A refugee participant expressed this reliance in the following way:

> *... after arriving in [place] we have a caseworker. The job of the caseworker is to make a follow-up regarding our everyday life, he takes us where we are needed, where we are wanted.....The person who helps us get use or get to know the way of living here.* (R6)

Almost every situation for a transitioning refugee is a new one, requiring them to engage with new information that is often presented in ways that are unfamiliar. Service providers who are engaged with the daily lives of settlers and who form the main source of information during this phase, recognise that information is more easily understood when it is presented in visual or oral form, often in person, and when it is focused towards being interactive and applied. A service provider describes this understanding based on his experience and observation of new refugees:

> *…I think they get bamboozled with information since they get here and don't want 1,000 written documents. …If we just looked at different ways to really engage and sink in people's minds other than your typical traditional written reading.…* (SP2)

Refugees' difficulties with written information mean that, where it exists, their own language community can become an important source of information, particularly those who come from communities with a longer history of settlement in the place in which the study was conducted. People who have been in Australia longer can help with interpretation of the

landscape and provide assistance with decision making about the everyday and social aspects of living within a new community. One participant expressed this in the following way:

> *When you find people from our community, they help you a lot, because there are things that the caseworker can't help with.* (R6)

Source Preference

Unlike immigrant preferences for information that have been reported in other studies (Caidi & Allard, 2005), participants in the study did not consider print materials (either paper based or digital) useful because of language and literacy barriers. A similar finding has also recently been reported by Yu (2010). In the initial stages of settlement, where language and literacy barriers exist, information received face-to-face from authoritative and trusted service providers is important to all in transition and continues to be highly valued by those settling in and settled. Even though over time refugees learn to map information sources to meet their complex settlement needs, they still prefer and value information from trusted sources, especially when information is new and considered critical.

Visual sources are also used and are more likely to be used for planning and negotiating. For example marketing catalogues are used as a visual source of information in relation to negotiating shopping for goods and services. In discussing catalogues as a planning source a recipient discussed his partner's and child's use of the source:

> *...she likes the junk mail, she likes to go through it and when my daughter comes from school she says oh yeah this one is coming.* (R5)

Another settled person describes how the 'junk mail' enables her to orient herself in relation to shopping:

> *I'm just trawling around, and also, the catalogues, you know the junk mail; I know people call it junk mail but sometimes it helps. So with my shopping, I shop around from those junk mails.* (S2)

Visual sources are also seen by service providers to provide a critical source of information. For example one service provider creates visual charts:

> *...so if they they've got an appointment with the doctor Wednesday, we'll have an image for the doctor ....so they can plan their week and know that at 10am on Wednesday you've got a doctor's appointment.* (SP4)

In another orientation exercise settlers become accustomed to Australian currency by role playing shopping transactions with play money. This enables them to become familiar with the various monetary denominations and to understand the basic cost of everyday food staples.

Use of technology

How participants use technology and digital information sources, such as the Internet, varies. For settlers in this study, particularly those who came as students, the Internet is seen as an

important source that enables them to connect with family and friends in other places, and to access information in their own language. However, the Internet is not an important information source for these refugees. The barriers they identify are language and literacy and also the expense of acquiring and maintaining a computer and Internet connection.

Although not mentioned explicitly in interviews with refugee settlers, service providers and the diaries of library staff reported that for school age refugees the Internet is an important tool for school work and for social networking, particularly for finding and making contact with family and friends made in refugee camps overseas, or who may have become separated during the refugee process. A senior manager who deals with refugee youth on a daily basis commented:

> *They are forever on Facebook ….how they have found other members of their families, relatives, people who are from the same refugee camp …or the same village originally ...* (SP4)

Barriers in the information landscape
For refugees, in addition to the barriers of education, literacy, and English language proficiency, the overwhelming complexity of the Australian information environment creates 'noise' which also acts as a barrier. Refugees perceive that there are *too many things to learn*, creating a sense of information overload and of urgency. Other barriers are the telephone and electronic information services used by a number of service providers. For example:

> *Look you come down to the system, the telephone, ….just huge there are you got to say...no you have to call this number, you call the number,...together you have to talk to the computer, you have to answer this question, you have to give, a date of birth, people are not used to it. There are sometimes they go to the end they just give up ...the problem still remains ...* (R5)

Furthermore, refugees perceive that much compliance information is complex and they are required to deal with it quickly. They are conscious that their lack of computer training and familiarity with this form of information provision limits their ability to understand and increases their response times, often causing them problems with the government.

Almost all the participants, both settlers and service providers, when asked what would help settlement and provide refugees with a sense of inclusion, responded "time". Time (or the lack of it) is a barrier and was a common theme for settlers and service providers. Refugees perceive that Australians in general and caseworkers and volunteers more specifically are busy and do not have enough time for them. Service providers also acknowledge lack of time as a barrier in their provision of information and services to refugees. For example:

> *In the past orientation has been very quick, it's been tick a box, it's been yes we told you about that …[What we would like] it's just money to buy the time where somebody can walk hand in hand with that person, would be a dream for me.* (SP4)

Similarly settler participants reported that:

> *It's huge, I guess it's all come down to time, like for example, Australians as a community haven't got time to wait for people like me, for example if you give me this one* [points to two pages] *it will take me about 3 or 4 hours to read it ...I think Australia needs to get a group of people who will slow down for these people ...* (R5)

Another indicated that a need for time was often perceived by the community as suspicious:

> *Yeah too fast, yeah too fast, ... Yeah, we no like it, you know, but between us they are sure, sure, sure, they use a short voice – yeah, short – shortcut, shortcut.... Yeah they make it quick. Yeah, make it quick – quick, quick.* (R4)

Conclusions and future research

In this study we identify three clear phases of settlement: transition, settling in, and being settled. In each phase the information experience differs because of changing needs, creating barriers for refugees, particularly in the setting in and becoming settled phases. Therefore, this study highlights the complexity of the information landscape that greets new settlers, in particular refugees in the transition phase. The information landscape for refugees is constructed around engagement with complex compliance and everyday information related to learning to live and participate in a new society. In addition to being complex, the information the settlers are required to understand can be overwhelming, conflicting and can cause a perception of information overload and social exclusion. This complexity is exacerbated by the use of digital technologies by services, government and other organisations as primary information media. The use of these media is underpinned by cultural and material assumptions about information competency and ease of access, which disregards the situation of many groups such as refugees who face barriers such as literacy, language and unfamiliarity with information technology. Even in the settling in phase, while settlers have developed a greater understanding and are moving towards informational self reliance, understanding particular kinds of information can prove a challenge.

In the transition phase, settlers acquire essential information by listening to, and observing, trusted mediators such as service providers and volunteers who act as information navigators. As people begin to settle in they develop more relationships in the community with friends and neighbours, and people from their own cultural and language groups, who join service providers and volunteers in helping settlers learn to map their information landscape, and thus develop more informational self-reliance and a sense of inclusion. This is easier for settlers with high levels of English language and literacy, and more difficult for those who do not have these competencies. There is further potential for exclusion of refugees in regional settings where unlike those in other studies (George & Chaze, 2009) there may be no existing groups from their own former countries to pave the way and provide support in communities not used to having an influx of people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Service providers offer important support in many ways, not least as navigators and mediators through the information landscape. In a regional setting they have the additional task of sensitizing the existing community to the needs of refugees. Unlike settlers in a

Canadian study (George & Chaze, 2009) who did not find help from government sources to be useful for everyday living, the refugees in this study appreciated and relied heavily on information provided through government via their caseworkers. As refugees complete the IHSS and no longer have the intensive information and social support provided by caseworkers, the study clearly identifies that many feel socially excluded. Service providers and refugees agree that a longer period of intensive support would be beneficial. The sense of exclusion comes from many quarters, including from a lack of socially and culturally appropriate information (Chow, 2010), but also because of a sense of information overload as described by Hancock (2009), and an inability to process information fast enough, and reliably enough in the complex information landscape that is modern Australian society.

Agenda for future study

This study identifies many areas requiring further understanding and a program of research is currently being established. For example, further study is needed in understanding how young refugees use the Internet and social networking tools to connect their former lives with their current life in Australia and how these ICTs might assist them to become more settled. Also, more in-depth focus on the role of information literacy and libraries in helping settlers meet information needs is needed. Lessons learned from such research may also inform programs that might help parents and the older generations learn to use the Internet and social networking tools for a smoother transition to the new country and culture.

In analysing information and developing ways of knowing about how an information landscape is constructed, information literacy practice may provide an organizing construct. The information literate person takes into account how and why information is provided and consider the discourse that surrounds information provision and the process by which information and knowledge are sanctioned within the particular setting (Lloyd, 2005). Information literacy has the capacity to "empower people in all walks of life to seek, evaluate, use and create information effectively to achieve their personal, social, occupational and educational goals" (Garner, 2006, p. 3). As such, and in the context of the research being reported here, the authors argue that there is a strong relationship between information illiteracy, information poverty, and social exclusion. In analysing information and developing ways of knowing how an information landscape is constructed, the information literate person takes into account how and why information is provided and considers the discourse that surrounds information provision and the process by which information and knowledge are sanctioned within the particular setting (Lloyd, 2005). Information literate people can be characterized as those who are enriched, enabled, and engaged within their information environments (Lloyd, 2006).

Constructing a way of knowing in the Australian cultural and material information landscape requires a specific type of information literacy practice which is not normally associated with traditional definitions of information literacy but, rather, is predicated on recognizing a range of activities that will enable access to information and facilitate understanding. Further explorations in this theoretical frame are proposed.

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