Purpose: The purpose of the research reported in this article is to understand how refugees learn to engage with a complex, multimodal information landscape and how their information literacy practice may be constructed to enable them to connect and be included in their new information landscape. Methodology: The study is framed through practice and socio-cultural theories. A qualitative research design is employed including semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups which are thematically analysed through an information practice lens. Findings: Refugees encounter complex and challenging information landscapes that present barriers to their full participation in their new communities. Social inclusion becomes possible where information is provided via sharing through trusted mediators who assist with navigating the information landscape and information mapping, and through visual and social sources. Research limitations/implications: The study is local and situated and therefore not empirically generalizable. It does however provide rich, deep description and explanation that is instructive beyond the specific research site and contributes to theory building. Practical implications: The study highlights the role, and importance, of social and visual information sources and the key role of service providers as mediators and navigators. Governments, funders and service providers can use these findings to inform their service provision. Originality/value: This is an original research paper in which the results provide practical advice for those working with refugees and which also extends theories of information literacy practice as an information practice.


Author Address: anlloyd@csu.edu.au
mkennan@csu.edu.au aqayyum@csu.edu.au

CRO Number: 40567
Connecting with new information landscapes: Information literacy practices of refugees

Dr Annemaree Lloyd, Dr Mary Anne Kennan, Dr Kim M. Thompson, Dr Asim Qayyum

School of Information Studies, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga Australia

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the research reported in this article is to understand how refugees learn to engage with a complex, multimodal information landscape and how their information literacy practice may be constructed to enable them to connect and be included in their new information landscape.

Methodology: The study is framed through practice and socio-cultural theories. A qualitative research design is employed including semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups which are thematically analysed through an information practice lens.

Findings: Refugees encounter complex and challenging information landscapes that present barriers to their full participation in their new communities. Social inclusion becomes possible where information is provided via sharing through trusted mediators who assist with navigating the information landscape and information mapping, and through visual and social sources.

Research limitations/implications: The study is local and situated and therefore not empirically generalizable. It does however provide rich, deep description and explanation that is instructive beyond the specific research site and contributes to theory building.

Practical implications: The study highlights the role, and importance, of social and visual information sources and the key role of service providers as mediators and navigators. Governments, funders and service providers can use these findings to inform their service provision.

Originality/value: This is an original research paper in which the results provide practical advice for those working with refugees and which also extends theories of information literacy practice as an information practice.

Keywords: Refugees; information literacy practice; information practice; social inclusion; social exclusion; information poverty
Introduction

In the debate about the causes of social inclusion/exclusion there is considerable discussion about the role of resources and access to services (Lloyd et al., 2010; Pierson, 2002; Silver and Miller, 2003; Vinson, 2009). However, one of the most fundamental resources – information – and the information literacy practices and related skills which enable people to access information and to critically evaluate and use information are rarely mentioned. A prerequisite for social inclusion is knowledge about the social, economic and community dimensions through which any society is constituted. This knowledge is derived through information and appropriate information literacy practice.

In Australia and elsewhere, social exclusion as an information problem has not been the focus of sustained research, and while there is some reported research focusing on immigrants, there is little information-related research that focuses specifically on refugees. A refugee is a person who is subject to persecution in their home country and who is in need of resettlement (ABS, 2008). The research reported in this paper seeks to understand the information literacy practices of refugee settlers and how these practices contribute to social inclusion. The study is situated in a regional town within the state of New South Wales, Australia, where newly arrived refugees are supported by the Australian Government in two programs: the Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) for the first six months which is followed by the Settlement Grants Program (SGP) for up to five years. Service providers who support the newly arrived settlers also participated in the study. The research focuses on the experience of refugees and service providers and also on the space that is created between the two groups. Service providers draw knowledge from previous experience of support to newcomers, and refugees attempt to connect to the information landscape of a new country.

The study examines the concept of refugee information literacy practice as a participatory practice that facilitates a way of knowing (Lloyd, 2006). The research questions that drive this study are:

- How do refugees connect and engage with information while they are settling?
- How are information literacy practices shaped?

More broadly, the study seeks to explore:

- How do information literacy practices manifest in refugee resettlement?

The empirical data is theorized through practice theory, in addition to composite theories related to information poverty and social exclusion. The findings of the study, suggest that from an information perspective, social exclusion is best understood from socio-cultural rather than socio-economic or technologically determined perspectives, as settlers struggle to move from the familiar information landscapes of their previous lives towards the new, established landscape that constitutes their new environment.

At an analytical level, and from an information perspective, social exclusion is therefore conceptualized as an information disjuncture, where individuals new to the information landscapes of a new

---

1 While the term immigrant is used in the international literature, it is less used in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses the term settler to cover new immigrants to Australia who arrive in a variety of ways, for example as business migrants, refugees, or as other permanent residents.
society—and therefore the established methods of information production, reproduction, circulation and modes of access—find that their previous information practices may no longer be adequate or appropriate in their new settings. This information disjuncture may cause refugees to be disconnected from their new society and community and result in an inability to effectively develop an awareness of, and engagement with, the formal and informal organising discourses of their new community and society. To compensate for this disjunction, in their first few months or even years, refugees focus on oral and visual sources of information rather than written materials. This has implications at government and community levels for the way in which information is provided. In addition, the findings of this research suggest that the overwhelming flow of information provided in an attempt to encourage social inclusion may in fact be counterproductive and contribute to social exclusion, as refugees experience information overload and pressure to make decisions with information before they are able to effectively process it.

For refugees the process of orientation and settlement require that pre-existing information practice be suspended and reassessed in order to access new information landscapes that are constructed to reflect knowledge and ways of knowing within a setting. The study highlights the complexity of this experience suggesting that as an information problem, social exclusion and its opposite, inclusion, are socio-cultural dimensions on a continuum, with different affordances and relationships in different social sites. The study also highlights how information literacy emerges in a group that is required to settle in an English speaking community with limited English proficiency.

Literature

Social exclusion as information problem: Issues

The concept of social exclusion has no universally accepted single definition (Atkinson, 1998; Hayes et al. 2008; Lloyd et al., 2010; Pierson, 2002; Silver and Miller, 2003). In his Australian review of the corpus of literature on inclusion and exclusion, Vinson (2009) suggests that while many definitions have been suggested for social exclusion, each is represented by a common set of elements (Lloyd et al., 2010). According to Vinson (2009), each definition identifies a “lack of connectedness”, and reflects, “the many sided nature of exclusion as well as the fact the social and physical environments in which 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). Exclusion is understood to be an issue that affects the whole community and economy (Warschauer, 2002; Warschauer, 2004).

The economic implications of social exclusion for individuals and their communities have been well documented. However, the social implications also require comment. Affective factors such as loneliness and stress influenced by an inability to find work, loss of social support, and mental health issues are factors that contribute to a feeling of social exclusion (George and Chaze, 2009). Similarly, an inability to effectively and independently connect with the information landscape due to language or literacy competency requires refugees to develop relationships with mediators and to make evaluations about trust. In separate studies, Hynes (2009)
and Leung (2010) both note that asylum seekers have “very little trust in institutions or political processes” (Hynes, 2009, p. 117).

While immigrants who are not refugees form a distinct unit of analysis and may have different issues to those of refugees, research conducted in Canada with immigrants (Caidi and Allard, 2005) provides an insight into some of the issues faced by both groups. A lack of access to information creates conditions and barriers that prohibit full participation in education, work, and everyday life. Consequently, those without access to information run the risk of becoming increasingly excluded from mainstream information sources and may fail to develop the capacity to fully settle, to recognize and take up opportunities, and to participate in society as full citizens. Based on this research, Caidi and Allard (2005) conceptualize social exclusion as an information problem. They suggest that immigrants in their study faced substantial information problems, in the first instance relating to the navigation of information related to basic needs such as housing, employment, education, and health. We would argue that refugees, as a distinct group, may face additional problems related to trust arising from the trauma caused by the circumstances of their departure from their homeland. Prolonged social exclusion will leave refugees at greater risk of remaining on the margins of society, excluded from participation in the democratic process, lacking opportunity for advancement in education and employment, and feeling a lack of inclusion in their new communities (Lloyd et al., 2010).

A lack of literacy (e.g., functional literacy in parent language and new language) is seen as creating a significant barrier to information access and is deemed by a number of authors to be an underlying cause of social exclusion (Aspinall, 2007, p. 278; Bigelow, 2010; Colic-Peisker, 2005). In a study of Bosnian refugees, Colic-Peisker (2005) identifies how limited English language skills and lack of information about employment assistance are factors that have resulted in economic and social exclusion. Another study suggests low literacy levels create barriers for newcomers, particularly for those newcomers in communities that employ information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital technology as primary dissemination devices (Yu, 2010). Much government information is now in digital form but research indicates that some immigrant groups, (e.g., African refugees, Borland and Mphande, 2006) often prefer print resources of information because of factors such as distrust of the Internet, and lack and/or expense of computer access. Goodall et al. (2010) emphasize that governments cannot assume that all the population are digitally literate and it is important that government information is available in multiple formats. Migliorino (2010) notes that while digital technology can be helpful for immigrants, technology can also act as a barrier, being expensive and difficult to access. In addition, information is available in a wide range of formats; thus the range of possible information formats and sources that refugees may draw from to aid in their settlement presents particular problems, especially when these formats and sources may be different from, or conflict with, their former country’s cultural values and ways of knowing (Palmer et al., 2009).

In addition to literacy and access issues, another potential ICT barrier to social inclusion has been identified by Wilding (2009). This author suggests that rather than promote social inclusiveness in their new environment, ICT access and social media may encourage young refugees in particular to connect with their own language or social groups in other locations. This may promote associated transnational obligations which distract young people from full participation in their new local communities.
Relationship between information literacy and social inclusion

The literature highlights a strong relationship between information literacy, information poverty, and exclusion. This relationship is recognized by UNESCO in its statements about information literacy and its 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). In the present study, information literacy is understood as a socially situated practice and is defined as a way of knowing an information landscape by developing practices and skills that will enable an individual to critically analyse the source from which information is accessed, in addition to the information itself, and to recognize this practice as a catalyst for learning (Lloyd, 2006, Lloyd, 2010).

Falling under the umbrella term of information literacy is a number of other literacies through which information literacy has been conceptualized (Warschauer, 2004). These areas focus on specific content or tool aspects of information literacy and include health literacy, which involves the knowledge and skills required to understand and use information related to health issues; prose literacy related to the ability to understand and use information from various kinds of narrative texts, including newspapers, magazines and brochures; document literacy, the development of knowledge and skills required to locate and use information in various formats including tables and charts; and digital literacy, the ability to locate, understand and evaluate information from computers (AB, 2009). This latter literacy is increasingly important as Australian governments and agencies provide information and services over the Internet and increasingly shift the focus from the simple provision of information to an expectation of more active participation from users (Cecez-Kecmanovic et al., 2009).

The ability to access and interrogate information is critical to social inclusion. According to Caidi and Allard (2005) very little is currently known about “the ways newcomers and longer established immigrant communities locate and access content in forms that are understandable and useable to them” (p. 303). Further, little is known about their “attitudes, values, awareness of and skills in utilizing various information institutions and related technologies” (p. 304). Developing an understanding of issues related to access and the use of technology may also provide an understanding of how information poverty may be experienced by newcomer groups and individuals within an established community.

A strong association exists between the ideas of information literacy and information poverty. The idea that limited access to information and associated information skills restricts the capacity of individuals to fully participate in society and to make informed decisions has been seen as an underpinning driver for information poverty. Over time, this reduced capacity can affect ability to extend social networks, to gain employment, maintain health and to improve educationally, thus creating a cycle of alienation, continued marginalisation and disenfranchisement in this sector of the community. This has lead Britz (2004) to define information poverty as “that situation in which individuals and communities within a given context, do not have the requisite skills, abilities or material means to obtain efficient access to information, interpret it and apply it appropriately” (p. 192). The research on social inclusion and the information experiences of immigrants is in its early stages. Research specifically with refugees in this field also requires further development.
Theory and method

A number of theoretical constructs have been employed to frame the study and guide the data collection and analysis.

Information practice

The concept of information practice has arisen in response to more general models of information behaviour (Savolainen, 2007). Information practices are understood in the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature to generally encompass information seeking, information use, and information sharing (Caidi and Allard, 2005; Caidi and MacDonald, 2008; McKenzie, 2003; Yu, 2010). They have been defined by McKenzie (2003), as a “range of practices that can be as premeditated as actively browsing for information to meet a known need or as serendipitous as encountering an unexpected sources, miscellaneous fact or familiar situation that may be of some assistance in meeting some present or future need” (p. 19). In relation to everyday practice, Savolainen (2008) defines information practice as “a set of socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use and share the information available in various sources such as television, newspapers, and the Internet” (p. 2).

The present study takes a different approach in that we are interested in how people learn to recognize and then engage with the information practices of a new setting, as well as how they learn to recognize what information is important, how information circulates and is accessed, and what sources will enable access to the knowledge bases of a society, and more narrowly to their local community. In particular we are interested in information literacy practice. As a social practice, information literacy is understood not only to be in the possession of an individual, but also as a possession of the community. It is therefore construed as a co-construction brought about by those who are co-located and participating in the everyday life of a community (Lloyd, 2010). This conceptualisation of information literacy practice is framed by composite socio-cultural theories. These theories emphasize the situatedness of activities, the role of mediation, the dynamics of interaction that emerge through co-location and participation in the ongoing practices of a setting, and the role of intersubjective understanding (tacit shared agreement) about what constitutes information and knowledge specific to the setting (Billett, 1996; Brown and Duguid, 2001; Lave and Wenger, 1991). From this perspective, information and ways of knowing are understood to reside in social relations that in turn reside in the practices that are intertwined with, and constitute, social life. These relationships influence the modalities of information (e.g., social, epistemic, and corporeal, Lloyd, 2010) and constitute the information landscapes of the setting.

A Schatzkian practice lens is used to guide the analysis and situate information practice ontologically as the site of the social. From this perspective, practice is understood to be constituted through a web of social, material, and corporeal activities that afford opportunities for engagement with information and knowledge that are specific to the particular setting. Practice thus enables the accomplishment of projects or ends (for example getting a job, getting an education, or as in the case of this study, becoming settled in a new community). To put this in another way, it is the practice that constitutes the site of the social, and social life transpires through an interwoven mesh of practices (Schatzki, 2002, p.151). Social life, according to Schatzki (2002), “is marked by social order and thus exhibits relatedness, meaning and mutual positioning” (p. 36). Simply put, the information
practices of a particular setting reflect what people in that setting do, say, and relate to, and reflect their understanding of what constitutes information and knowledge.

**Defining information practice and information literacy as social practice**

The definition of information practice adopted for this study and employed as an organising construct takes the notion a step further, embedding it in the ontology and epistemology of a social site. Knowledge is therefore understood as a *social artefact*, which reflects the collective social-cultural, material-economic, and historic truths of the social site and is reflected in the language of ‘sayings’ and manifested as ‘doings’ (Schatzki, 2002). Information practices are not static arrays of routinised action, but are fluid and ongoing array of activities that are enabled or constrained according to information landscapes associated with the social site. Information practice is thus seen as an array of information related activities and skills, constituted, justified and organized through the arrangements of a social site, and mediated socially and materially with the aim of producing shared understanding and mutual agreement about ways of knowing, and recognizing how performance is enacted, enabled and constrained in collective situated action. (Lloyd, 2011,p.285)

Thus, information practice and the activities that constitute it reflect the ‘heritaged’ conditions of the social setting and the ways of knowing that are legitimized as part of the cultural practices of the setting.

In evaluating and analysing information, information literate people take into account how and why information is provided, and consider the discourse surrounding information provision and the process by which information and knowledge are sanctioned within particular settings (Lloyd, 2005). In complex multimodal societies such as Australian society, information is available in a wide range of formats and from many sources. Consequently, the range of possible information sources from which refugees may draw, presents particular problems, especially when these sources are in conflict with their former country’s cultural values and the ways of knowing they bring with them (Palmer et al., 2009).

**Relationship between information literacy practice and information practice**

As an example of an information practice, information literacy cannot be reduced to a description of skills or competencies, but needs to be understood as practice that produces an outcome (being information literate) of the social setting through which it emerges. The shape of information literacy practice reflects the setting and the way in which the use of information and the knowledge information produces, is sanctioned, and legitimized by those who are co-located and co-participating in day-to-day activities. It therefore becomes a critical task in describing information literacy to understand how the practice emerges in the activities and arrangements of the setting and its agreed-upon methods of producing, reproducing, circulating, accessing, and disseminating information.

**Method**

The researchers utilised a socio-cultural approach to exploring refugees’ information literacy practices to
understand how these contribute to social inclusion. Socio-cultural approaches emphasise that all practices are socially constructed and mediated, thus producing a shared understanding between people who are co-located (Brown and Duguid, 2001).

The study was conducted in a regional town in New South Wales, Australia. Using qualitative methods, the study was designed in three phases. In phase one a steering committee comprising service providers and refugees was established to oversee the various phases of the study and provide advice to the research team. For phase two, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Minichiello et al., 2008). Focus groups were held in phase three.

Sample and data collection and analysis

Participation in the study was voluntary and all participants had the study explained to them, using interpreters (if requested), prior to consenting to participate. In the last twenty years the movement of people across borders and continents to Australia has occurred for many reasons and often without consideration of socio-economic or educational status. In this study, the status of refugee was the only purposive criteria for this study. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2008) a refugee is a person who is subject to persecution in their home country and who is in need of resettlement.

Two separate phases of data collection were conducted. In the first phase, ten settlers were interviewed, with trained interpreters providing support when required. The sample for phase one data collection comprised five females and five male participants. Six of these participants had arrived in Australia with refugee status and one participant had arrived as part of the family reunion scheme. Highest qualifications held by participants at the time of the study ranged from primary school (3), high school (4), overseas tertiary qualification (e.g., Diploma, Masters; 3). Participants’ ages ranged from 30-34 (3), 34-39, (3) 40-44 (2) and 55-59 (1). Analysis of the phase one interviews revealed that the refugee experience was more intensive and complex than that of other settlers. Therefore it was decided to concentrate the phase two focus groups on further elaboration of the refugee experience. Five service providers who support refugee settlement in Australia were also interviewed during phase one of the study.

Focus groups were held in the second phase of the study, after the initial coding had been completed from the phase one interviews. The focus groups enabled the researchers to explore the themes and perspectives that emerged from phase one in depth. Two focus groups were held. Refugees comprised group one (five participants) and service providers comprised group two (also five participants). The sample for the refugee focus group was drawn from the original sample of phase one participants. Selection was based on participant availability rather than any set criteria. Three of the original sample agreed to participate, and a further two participants were also recruited based on recommendations from other participants.

Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed using a professional service. Two types of coding were employed: initial coding, which was conducted during the phase one data collection and was aimed at establishing the themes and perspectives. This was followed by focused coding, which provided analytical depth and rigor. Data analysis was influenced by the qualitative constructivist grounded theory
approach of Charmaz (2003). Every effort was made to present the viewpoint of participants. The findings of the interview phase shaped the focus group questions.

Quotes are verbatim and are used throughout this paper to illustrate and highlight important themes. Service providers (who support the transition and resettlement of refugees) are identified by the letters SP. While the voices of refugees are represented by the letter R, and those of other immigrants as I. Focus group voices are identified as FGM (focus group male) or FGF (focus group female).

In a study of practice, it is not the practice that is the unit of analysis, but the range of activities that constitute the practice. As such the analysis for this research is also concentrated on identifying activities that connected participants with their new information landscapes.

**Study context: Humanitarian programs in Australia**

In Australia, the information landscape for refugees is highly specialized and formed through a complex array of organizational services which frame the legislative and humanitarian requirements for settlement. As mentioned earlier, refugee settlement is supported through two programs. The Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (HSS) provides initial, intensive settlement support for refugees in their first six months of settlement. This support includes assessments of settlement needs and delivery of services to meet needs in a coordinated way. Services include case coordination, information and referral services, arrival receptions and assistance, accommodation services, and short term torture and trauma counselling services. The Settlement Grants Program (SGP) provides continued, but less intensive, support for refugees after they have exited the HSS program and is available to refugees for up to five years. The focus of the SGP program is to develop independence and self-reliance in new settlers.2

**Findings: Settling into new information landscapes**

This study identifies four main sets of findings: 1) refugees move through three phases of settlement; 2) the Australian information landscape in which they find themselves is complex, and different to their prior information landscape, thus refugees require assistance with mediation and navigation of that landscape; 3) early on their major information concerns centre around everyday living and compliance; and 4) visual and social or embodied forms of information communication work best, especially in the early phases of settlement. These findings are elaborated below and conclude with a discussion about the barriers to information literacy and information practice faced by refugees. These barriers form significant contributing factors to social exclusion and civic participation.

---

2 For further information on the HSS see [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66hss.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/66hss.htm) and the SGP see [http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/92funding.htm](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/fact-sheets/92funding.htm). Other programs are available through the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, but these are the programs referred to by both the service provider and refugee participants in the pilot interviews.
Phases of resettlement

New settlers move through three phases of settlement. These phases have been introduced in an earlier paper as transitioning, settling in, and being settled (Kennan et al., 2011). The current study indicates that the transitioning phase begins before settlers arrive, as they seek and are given information about their new country. This phase is more difficult and lasts longer for settlers with low levels of formal education or with low English skills. Case workers are the primary information source during this period, particularly with regard to compliance information, or information related to rules and regulations of the society in general and the community in particular. Immediate information needs (i.e., related to food, clothing, shelter, medical care) are also anticipated by service providers and delivered through the settlement programs currently in place.

The settling in phase occurs as refugees move from the intense HSS service to the more independent SGP at the six month mark. Reliance on caseworkers is still apparent but to a much lesser degree, as settlers have developed networks and skills that allow them to identify new navigator aids who assist them with issues they do not know how to work through themselves. The settlers are also better aware of their own information needs and more able to select appropriate resources that help them meet these needs.

Finally, participants who are settled show understanding of the information landscape and are reflective of their progress through the previous settlement phases. Settlers in this phase are able and willing to share what they have learned with other settlers, considering the sharing of information as a way to strengthen the community in which they live and engage in community life.

As settlers move between these phases they begin to identify the activities and refine the skills that will provide them with opportunities to develop a map of the information landscape and which will furnish them with chances to engage with information that orients them within their new community. Thus new refugees need to identify and establish relationships that support their transitioning into a new community by connecting them with people who can mediate and interpret the new information landscape for or with them. The phases have some resonance with Mwarigha’s stages of resettlement (2002, p. 9).

Information landscapes

In each of the phases described above, settlers learn to engage with the information landscapes of their new country and more specifically of their new community. This information landscape is novel, complex, and multimodal. Access to information may occur through a range of media, each of which requires a range of information related activities and information skills.

Within the broad information landscape, each specific information landscape has its own distinctive shape and character (e.g., educational landscapes will differ from workplace landscapes, which in turn will differ from medical ones). Defined by Lloyd (2006; 2010) as an intersubjective space, each information landscape reflects the taken for granted and agreed upon modalities of information that are understood by people who are engaged in the collective practices and performances of that landscape. These modalities are constructed through epistemic, social, and corporeal experiences with information. The prominence of each modality within a landscape will reflect the ontological nature of the particular setting.
Information landscapes were described by refugees as “huge”, “overwhelming” and “too much.” To alleviate the stress of settlement, information relationships were developed between refugees and mediators (caseworkers, volunteers). For refugees the task becomes one of identifying the affordances of the various landscapes (medical, education, workplace, community) that mediators introduce them to, and over time understanding the discourses that inform and organize each landscape. Refugees also develop an understanding about the range of information related activities that enable them to enter and connect with the discourse and thus access information. For many refugees in this study, the task is complex as they learn to reconcile their pre-existing information practice with the practices of their new community.

**Compliance and everyday information landscapes: Getting to know a ‘way of living’**

Two primary information landscapes are described in this analysis (although numerous others are also identified).

**Compliance information landscapes**

The compliance landscape is associated with rules, regulations, policies, and procedures that govern information related to the legislative requirements of settlement and everyday citizenship. It includes federal and local laws related to parenting, visas, social security and income support, getting a driving license, knowing the road rules, or enrolling in a course. The formal nature of this information is understood by new arrivals to be authoritative and thus requiring attention. The formal and often legal nature of compliance often requires that compliance information be disseminated in a print medium or electronically. This is often inaccessible to refugees because of language and/or literacy barriers; however, refugees must quickly come to terms with compliance information which affects them, despite these difficulties. In the first few months of settlement the primary aim for new refugees is to develop an understanding of where sources of information are situated in relation to compliance and how access and understanding are facilitated. A service provider highlighted the difficulty that print based materials cause settlers and the issues it causes for service providers:

…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)

The development of compliance knowledge enables settlers who have often experienced traumatic circumstances prior to entering Australia and experienced some anxiety with regard to understanding compliance in Australia when they arrive to feel safe in their new surroundings and to develop some understanding of the rules, regulations, and legislation which will now be a part of their lives:

… they told me there are a lot of rules and if you break those rules you will be punished. (R3)

Because if they [service provider organisation] are not have 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, and dissemination of information and mediation around information sources is targeted. As one service provider stated:
...my role is running information sessions ... which target ...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)

The transition and settling in phases are marked by an acceptance of information. Refugees work closely with, and are reliant on, caseworkers who assist them in navigating the compliance system and community volunteers who assist them in mapping the everyday living terrain.

**Everyday information landscapes**

The everyday information landscape is broad and complex and associated with information that is required for participation in daily life. Within this landscape, many other landscapes can also be recognized e.g., health, employment, education, and these will be analysed in future papers. In general, however, everyday information may be informal, or information that is *nuanced*; for example the taken-for-granted conventions that are implicit within a society. Also implicit in everyday information is *contingent* knowledge – that is, knowledge that is only available at the moment of practice.

Service providers and volunteers work closely with refugees to ensure that they are able to connect and map sources of information in their everyday landscapes. A refugee 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)

For refugees every stage of settling is unique and often uncertain, and requires that they connect with information in ways that may be beyond their level of language or literacy competency. Drawing from their previous experiences, service providers and volunteers - who are engaged with the day-to-day lives of refugees and who act as primary sources of information - recognize the importance of visual and oral information for this group.

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

However, refugees also noted that not all information from their own community was useful, nor could it be trusted. Community generated information was sometimes based on misinformation and commonly held
superstitions. A participant describes how she was told not to place her Medicare\(^3\) card and her bank card together in her wallet. This participant was told that these cards could ‘talk’ to each other and Centrelink\(^4\) would know how much money she had and her money may disappear. Partly as a result of this incident, this participant stated:

…I don’t trust the information I got from my community. (FGF1)

Refugees in the study also noted that assumptions are often made by service providers that refugees will assist each other. This highlights issues related to a lack of cultural knowledge by service providers, in addition to assumptions about the accuracy in interpreting information. Thus, reliance on caseworkers and volunteers as authoritative, trustworthy, and objective sources of information is intense.

You have to trust them because you don’t know anything about this country. (FGM1)

Identifying basic information sources in the landscape

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 provider groups who are engaged with the daily lives of refugees 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 participant describes this understanding based on his experience and observation of new refugees in the first six months after arrival:

…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 book or something…. (SP2)

Refugee participants in the present study did not consider print (either print based or digital) useful because of language and literacy barriers. This differs from many of the findings presented in Caidi, Allard and Quirke’s (2010) review. However, in the present study other ways of disseminating were identified by settlers and service providers as being highly useful.

Visual information sources

Visual sources are likely to be used for planning and negotiating, rather than to simply meet immediate needs. For example in this study, shopping catalogues and store flyers are used as a visual source of information for negotiating the marketing environment. A participant, now settled-in, describes how this ‘junk mail’ enabled her to orient herself in relation to the shopping area:

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. So when I get that,…..I do Coles and Woolworths and Franklin’s and ALDI. So I normally check, if I need meat,

---

\(^3\) Medicare is the government program which oversees the delivery of health and medical services and payments.

\(^4\) Centrelink is the government program which delivers a range of social and welfare payments and services http://www.humanservices.gov.au/corporate/about-us/
...alright Coles is this price, or this is the price or this is the price and I say ok, if I need that I go to okay. (12)

As a source of negotiating information, visual information plays an important role the complexity of the shopping centre and getting a good price. Another participant describes this experience:

*It is helpful like the last…I paid about $130 for it. I went looking through this junk mail and I saw it for $80.00 and come on, I went for it and then get my money back and took the $80.00 one. (R5)*

Visual sources are also seen by service providers to provide a critical source for dissemination. For example one service provider uses visual information to overcome language difficulties and to alert settlers to various appointments, creating a visual chart:

*...to help an individual or a family in terms of appointments...we might do a visual chart for them,...so if 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 10 am on Wednesday you’ve got a doctor’s appointment. (SP4)*

The limited English language skills of all refugee groups is recognized by service providers, who endeavour to provide more visual forms of information, utilizing a range of technologies. For example:

*Well things are that are quite interactive so whether it’s PowerPoint or even just drawing on a board thing like pictures, examples and more visuals I think are easier because even with some clients who may not have 100% English proficiency you’d be amazed at what people can pick up as well. (SP2)*

A service provider from the local public library suggested the types of resources that are of interest to settlers, many of whom use the library, in particular in the company of their school age children. This participant also recognized that is not only information that connects refugees to their past lives that is important but, particularly for younger refugees, information sources that connects them to their new lives:

*So visual things, DVDs ... music. They actually want to hear what’s kind of funky in their new country ... then mostly, ... magazines, and then the kids area, they're very interested in the children's area. Especially, where you've got books and CDs together, where you can look at the book and listen to the book at the same time. (SP1)*

Another service provider provided an example of the way interactive visual material was successfully used in a financial information session that enabled refugees to become accustomed to Australian currency, by role-playing shopping transactions with 'play money':

*... we made a big table on a board of wants and needs so just by visually placing say $400 in the fake notes and she let people put them were they think on the wants and needs and how they should budget it and so people were actually able to do that and physically just because money and math and things like that can be quite hard— so things like that really sink in better I think. (SP2)*
Finally, observation also provides an important visual information gathering activity for settlers with limited English, particularly in relation to everyday information. The ‘cue’ to information gathering is provided by the service providers, who suggest observing what else is happening in the community:

*Well like for the garbage, I was informed by the Multicultural [Council], come out look at the street and [if you] see the [neighbour’s] bins, take your bin out.* (R5)

**Social and embodied information sources**

Social information, defined here as information embodied within social networks which is difficult to articulate or express in written form, as it is drawn from real life experiences (Lloyd 2010), plays a significant role in learning about the information landscape. These types of information may be defined as nuanced, contingent or *tacit* (unspoken, social convention). Social information is inherently tied to information sharing. It is often shared via storytelling or through tips and tricks about everyday living observed and shared over time. Both refugees and service providers shared stories about the type of information long time residents of a country might know, but which are difficult and opaque to settlers.

In discussing the role storytelling might play as a way of sharing embodied information, a service provider describes information that is best suited to this form of dissemination such as preparing for shopping:

*....tips for like when shopping look for mid-year sales buy clothes, once again things we take for granted. It might be catch the bus, go to this place to find out about timetables, telling you the basics about every aspect of living.* (SP2)

or job interviews:

*if someone went for a job interview....you’d know what to wear, you’d be more informed when going into the interview to know what to wear , how to present yourself all that sort of stuff, I think so once again all that stuff they may not know.* (SP2)

The importance of embodied and experiential information is understood to be an important social source:

*I think hearing a story from someone who’s actually already navigated that process, is very powerful, because it's like, I was like you were, ... this is where I've got to and I can tell you my story and show you how that might help you, ... I think learning from other people’s experiences is a good way to do that.* (SP1)

This participant also reflects on the role of the library as a central information source and the service’s need to change in order to meet the unmet needs of an increasing diverse population:

*I think there’s a huge volume of unmet needs, ... I think if you walk in and everything’s written in a language that doesn’t mean anything to you, ... I think we probably, well up to date, haven’t actually engaged in the sense of going to actually talk with people and just finding out what they would like to have in the library.* (SP1)
Both refugees themselves and service providers recognize the enormity of the challenges faced by refugees. They described some of the everyday things:

*People need to learn how to use a mobile phone, learn immediate things like this is hot water.* (SP2)

*Basic stuff…the housing, the employment, the income, the education…some won’t understand money.* (R5)

Case workers and volunteers take on the role of navigators, assisting refugees in meeting their compliance requirements and in their mapping of formal information sources. An intense relationship is created between the two groups. Refugees recognize their lack of experience in their new information landscape, and their inability to evaluate either the information or the source. Several mentioned that they sometimes get conflicting information, or information they do not understand. In these circumstances they turn to service providers for clarification and guidance. As one refugee articulated:

*The [service provider organization] is showing me what is true.* (R1)

Sometimes service providers anticipate predetermined needs, and at other times the information provision often occurs in a ‘just in time fashion’, as problems or needs arise. A refugee describes how information needs are anticipated:

*…when we first arrived here did not come to ask for a doctor, but we were given a doctor... Like when we first arrived here were told that this day you have to go to this doctor for this vaccination or whatever appointment so we went there.* (R5)

Similarly, a service provider describes how they anticipate the needs of refugees:

*We enrol them in education, and so on. Doctors’ appointments, dentists’ appointments, optometrists, anything….What their need is... we link them with resources within the community.* (SP3)

**Barriers to information literacy**

Participants also identified the barriers faced during settlement. The inability to effectively communicate and thus to access information can be caused by social and/or physical factors. Limited English language proficiency and barriers that are created when newcomers are unaware of nuanced and taken-for-granted information exacerbated this issue. For refugees, the complexity of the information environment creates a barrier and is reflected in their perception that there are too many things to learn. One participant expressed his concern that he would be left behind because of the time it takes him to understand:

*… by the time they arrive here, within a fortnight there is a letter from Centrelink, you need to do this, you need to do that, ... It is too much.* (R5)

Another focus group member highlighted that it was very easy to become confused about information:

*It’s very hard to understand many things at one time…it’s confusing to manage.* (FGM1)
A participant also expressed his frustration with the telephone information services used by a number of services providers, which are unfamiliar to people who have lived in refugee camps:

> Look, you come down to the system, the telephone, you have to call this number, you call the number, ... 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)

Here the participant expresses his frustration at the telephone online system that he sees as hampering his progress, he feels constrained by the system and recognizes the barrier it creates in relation to meeting his needs and assisting his settlement. The same participant expressed a common feeling that the text based material (in particular letters from government agencies) were not useful because of the perception by refugees that this information needs to be dealt with quickly and yet they need to get help to deal with it.

How information is being provided is a barrier for a number of participants, for example, the need for computers as a primary resource to access government information. Refugees perceive text based information to be formal and complex because it is often related to official compliance, and requires them to act and respond quickly. Refugees’ lack of information literacy, computer and digital literacy skills, and their lack familiarity with this form of information provision limits their ability to understand and increases their response times.

Almost all the participants, when asked what would help refugee settlement, responded, in various ways, “time.” Time is a barrier for both refugee participants and service providers. Refugees perceive that Australians are busy and do not have enough time for them. Service providers, based on their experiences, also recognize that overwhelming amount of information and the varying methods of delivery create barriers to effective comprehension:

> In the past orientation has been very quick, it’s been tick a box, it’s been yes we told you about that ... 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]

A refugee participant expresses his frustration that his lack of language competency inhibits his ability to deal with information and requests for information efficiently and this ultimately impacts on successful social inclusion:

> It's huge, I guess it's all come down to time like for example Australian 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 of text] it will take me about 3 or 4 hours to read it and I don't know what the content is ...I think Australia needs to get a group of people who will slow down for us people. (R5)

**Key activities of information literacy practice**

Settling into a new country and community requires a commitment to becoming informed about new information landscapes and new ways of knowing. Knowing a new information landscape and its underlying discourses presents several challenges for refugees. In the first instance and particularly for the refugees in this
study, the level of English proficiency, and in particular, reading and writing proficiency, prevents this group from engaging effectively with text based digital and print information commonly used to deliver and disseminate information. This creates significant problems in relation to refugees’ ability to connect with the organizing discourses surrounding compliance knowledge, to effectively understand information, or to respond in a timely manner to written requests for information.

Secondly, the nuanced, tacit, or contingent everyday information of the community, situated within specific contexts and manifested through norms and values, is often invisible to refugees. This invisibility prevents refugees in the early stages of transition from more speedily becoming settled. As language proficiency is a gradual process, the successful transition into a new community requires that new settlers connect with mediators who can provide assistance with navigation and mapping of the new environment.

Results from the study suggest that the information literacy practice that facilitates settlement is constituted through a range of participatory activities which orient refugee compliance and everyday information through a range of sources. This type of information literacy practice conflicts with more established and routinised descriptions of information literacy, in particular those produced by UNESCO (cf. Garner, 2006), which focus on information skills rather than activities.

The formation of information literacy practice which occurs in the transitioning and settling in stages and leads to being settled manifests through the following activities:

**Information sharing** represents a core activity and affords opportunities to access information. This activity is foundational to learning about the information landscape, relevant sources, and ways of accessing information. In sharing information, refugees begin the process of situating themselves within broader society, more specifically into their new community. The sharing of information between case workers, volunteers, and refugees provides opportunities to engage with new environments, introduces intersubjective understandings, and enables the process of mapping information sources. Sharing information acts as a catalyst for the establishment of a relationship between refugees and individuals who are already co-located and aligned. As navigators and mediators, caseworkers and volunteers share their experiences of the various information landscapes that exist within the broader landscape, and which are essential for transition and settling in. Through sharing, service providers are able to interpret and mediate the environment for, and on behalf of, refugees who are not yet established. Similarly, information sharing occurs between refugee community members and there is recognition that tacit, nuanced, and contingent information is also more likely to be shared by longer standing refugee community members who through their own settlement experiences are more likely to recognize and identify cultural norms and folkways, which are taken-for-granted by the established community.

Information sharing enables new refugees to:

- Identify appropriate mediators to assist in learning about formal rules and regulations (e.g., case workers, volunteers, government and non-government organizations, and later neighbours, workmates, and fellow community members);
• Recognize appropriate information affordances (e.g., in people, organisations, documents, and places that furnish opportunities to engage with information that will facilitate their inclusion in their new community);
• Become familiar with appropriate ways of accessing information;
• Align their information seeking to the information landscapes of the specific community; and
• Develop the ability to evaluate information for its veracity, applicability, and use.

Implicit within information sharing is the activity of influence work (Lloyd, 2011) where, through the sharing of knowledge, navigators implicitly align new settlers to the compliance and everyday knowledge that is agreed upon and valued by the community.

Information mapping. This information creation activity is dynamic and incremental in nature. Newcomers begin to locate and map appropriate sources relevant to particular needs and thus orient themselves within their new community. For example, information about sources of compliance knowledge may be mapped to caseworkers, particular service providers, or organisations. As refugees’ experience of the environment becomes more sophisticated so does the tacit information map they develop. The activity of mapping also provides an affordance for other new members, as this information can then be shared.

Observing and listening to others was described by participants as an important activity, especially during the transition and settling in stages. These are social activities which provide understanding and access to information to both the observed and the observer, the listener and the speaker. Observation provides access to tacit and contingent information and may act as the catalyst for questioning and discussion.

These activities contribute to the development of appropriate information literacy practices which enable refugees to not only understand their immediate and critical needs (for example food, shelter, health), but also to move beyond these critical needs and towards the broader and more complex information landscapes in their new communities. Information sharing practices increase where settlers who have become established become the referral source for others, reflecting their increasing social capital.

Discussion: Understanding social exclusion and inclusion from an information perspective

From an information perspective, the process of settlement for refugees can be understood as cyclical and iterative, whereby refugees move from incomprehension to deeper understanding and then back again as their knowledge of the information landscape, their information experiences, and their needs become more sophisticated and complex. New refugees experience an information disjuncture when they feel disconnected from the information landscapes of their new communities and from entrenched and localized methods of information production, reproduction, circulation, and modes of access. The result of this disjuncture can be social exclusion resulting from a combination of socio-cultural factors such as language and literacy barriers, an inability to understand the nuanced, tacit, and contingent elements of communication and information, a lack of cultural awareness of pre-existing members of their new communities about information practices and activities in other cultures, or the overwhelming amount of mediated and unmediated information that refugees are
required to deal with during the transition and settling in phases. In these early phases newcomers to a community find that their previously established information practices are no longer appropriate and thus do not connect them effectively to their new landscapes, resulting in a requirement for navigators and mediators, and some require extended periods of time with these navigators and mediators to effectively access the formal and informal organising discourses of their new community or society.

This study highlights the role that information literacy practice, particularly as it is constituted in the activities of information sharing, mapping, observation, and listening, plays in the orientation and settlement of newcomers, thus addressing their information disjunct. The study also importantly points to the notion of information literacy as a critical practice that connects people with the information life worlds of a community and, on a grander scale, with a new society. Information literacy facilitates access, which is critical to successful transition, settling in, and being settled.

In order to engage with unfamiliar environments that are shaped in culturally different ways and employ a range of information, refugees learn to reconcile their previous information practices – which may in many cases be centred around oral cultures – in order to recognize appropriate information and socio-material practices used by the new community to disseminate information, such as text and ICT. Refugees need to reshape their information practice in order to know the landscape of their adopted country and community. Hence, as reported in the literature (George and Chaze, 2009; Hammer et al, 2010), community and informal networks (particularly networks of service providers, volunteers and people from their own cultural and linguistic background) afford significant informational opportunities in relation to nuanced and everyday living needs although reports that this information is not always correctly mediated indicates that research in this area is warranted.

The phases of transitioning, settling in, and being settled are a continuum that may be circular and iterative, with refugees returning to earlier phases as their information landscapes become more complex. Access to local systems and institutions were identified as important in the intermediate phase and in the final phase, the opportunity to participate fully in the social, political, and economic aspects of their adopted community and society. The findings also indicate that the transitioning stage is marked by a need to engage with sources related to compliance knowledge to meet legislative and policy requirements. A need commonly expressed by refugees, many of whom previously resided in humanitarian aid camps, was the need to stay safe and inside the rules, and there was recognition of the role information and service providers played in enabling them to do so.

The transition phase is also marked by a basic and immediate need for food, shelter, housing, medical, and income support. However, due to the overwhelming complexity and difference from their previous environments, refugees in this study suspended overt information seeking activity in the transition phase, relying on the experiences and expertise of caseworkers and volunteers to ensure that their basic and immediate needs were provided. Thus, as they move from transitioning to settling in, refugees must also move from a state of mediated information provision to using the information activities learned from the mediators and navigators to become socially included.
The present study highlights the critical role that visual and social sources play in this regard, enabling understanding which increases social inclusion, particularly for refugees with limited literacy or English language proficiency. Whilst a previous study (Caidi and Allard, 2005) noted the importance of newspapers and the Internet as critical information sources, the present study does not support this finding, primarily because the cohort was predominately refugee settlers with language and literacy challenges. Instead it highlights the importance of sources such as people, shopping catalogues/flyers, and DVDs.

The study also demonstrates that information literacy practice in this context takes a different shape to that reported in the literature. Information literacy practice for new refugees focuses on social and corporeal information activities – through oral communication or observational practices – and thus highlights the importance of social and corporeal information modalities for groups who are new to culturally foreign information landscapes. The study also reveals that information needs may not always be determined by the individual but may be determined on behalf of the individual by more experienced ‘others’ within the information landscape. A consequence for service providers is the need to develop information resources that reflect this type of information literacy practice with its required commitment of time and people, rather than try to impose on newcomers textual, technologically based, and other dissemination practices. There is also a need to ensure that information literacy is relevant and situational, and this may shift the onus on to service providers to act not only as navigators and mediators of information but also as information literacy educators in support of their clients.

Finally, and upon reflection, while the methods employed in the study yielded a rich data set of interviews, field notes and observations, future studies undertaken by the researchers in this field will benefit from the use of alternative techniques such as photo-voice techniques. While all participants in the current study were able to converse in English, the researchers note that cultural nuances may have been absent from the interviews and therefore remain unaccounted in the analysis.

**Conclusion**

There is great value in approaching the concept of social exclusion from an information perspective. This approach acknowledges that the ability to become socially included is predicated on the ability to connect and engage with the information of a community. The notion of social exclusion as an information problem is based on the western conception of information poverty, whereby poverty is underpinned by an inability to recognize viable sources of information, to access information that is circulated and distributed within an information framework support by culturally authorized organising practices. Exclusion is not only from the normative aspects of a society’s governance, but may also include exclusion from the social conventions that shape refugees’ everyday connection with their community.

Social inclusion is gradually enabled as refugees develop the ability and capacity to engage with their new information landscapes and connect with their new communities. However, for the refugees who participated in this study this landscape and the practices used to access it are often inaccessible to them, not only because of language, but also because of preconceived ideas of about how information should be made accessible to these groups. Recognizing that information needs to be provided in a range of formats and that
access often requires a range of non-textual and non-technological skills or activities initially through social mediators is the first step in the process. These activities may not conform to our standard view of information literacy practice, but will enable refugees to become oriented and familiar with or to know their new communities more rapidly. The study also demonstrates the critical role played by those already immersed in the established environment in mediating and interpreting the environment for new refugees. Underlying this, but beyond the scope of the present study, is the role of power in developing the information literacy practices of new settlers. Social exclusion is also exacerbated by an inability of the dominant cultural group to acknowledge that information provision must occur on many levels that should include provision through a range of communication mediums and activities.

The study highlights that, from an information perspective, some of the issues surrounding social exclusion can be defined as lack of awareness of information; the inability of refugees to readily access the established information environments of the community; the inability to understand the paths, nodes, and edges of the information landscapes; and the taken-for-granted assumptions of existing communities about how information is best disseminated.

Social inclusion becomes possible when the pre-existing and emerging information practices of refugees are taken into account, and where information is provided through the transition and settling in phases via information sharing through trusted mediators who can assist with information sharing, information mapping, and through provision of visual and social sources. Other information, such as that provided in text on web sites, in booklets and pamphlets, by complex interactions with telephones and computers, with the best will in the world, continue to be alienating and exclusionary for quite some time after settlement.

Acknowledgements

The authors acknowledge with thanks, the support of the participating service provider organisations. We also acknowledge the contribution of our colleague Suzanne Lipu in development, data collection, and analysis in the early stages of the project. We are grateful to all the interviewees who gave us their time and their views. The Charles Sturt University Competitive Grant and the Small Grant from the Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE) that helped fund this research are also acknowledged with thanks.

References


