



# **Judith Thomas & Fizza Sabir**

The University of Adelaide

Investigating Refugee Secondary Student Perspectives on  
Models of Engaged Learning & Teaching



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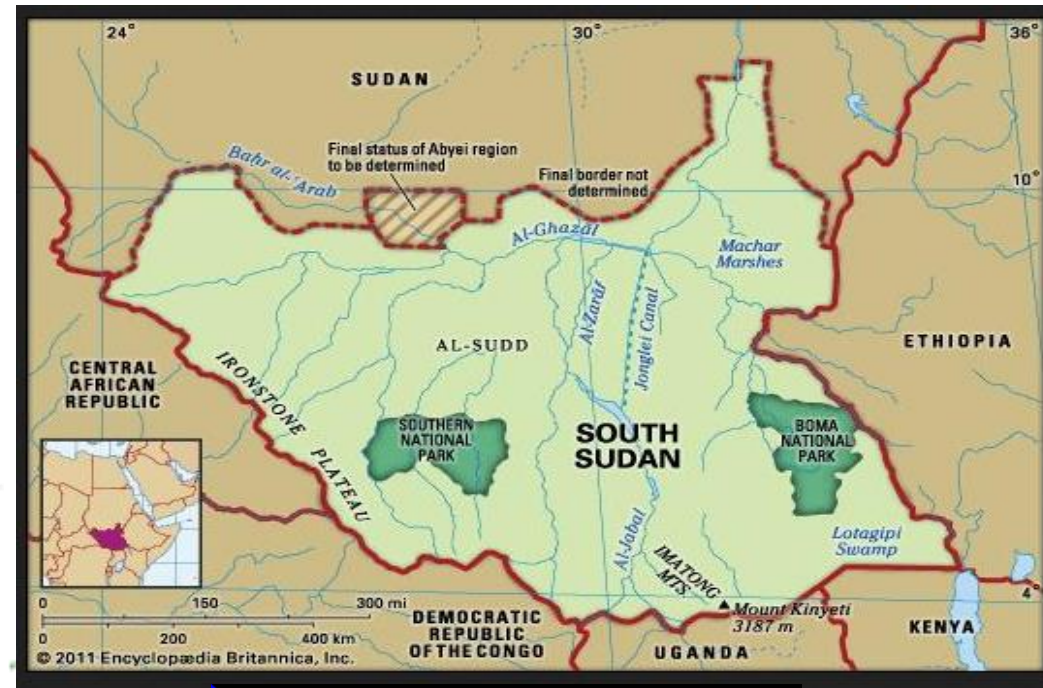
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## Context : Southern/South Sudan July 9 2011 Independence





## How many South Sudanese refugees in South Australia?

- ☐ **CENSUS 2011: 1416**- 7.3% of 19,369 total of 'Sudan-Born' in Australia
  - ☐ **CENSUS 2016: 903**-11.73% of 7,697 total of 'Sudan-Born' in Australia
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## **Context : Refugees from South/ern Sudan**

- ☐ Disrupted learning in Southern Sudan due to decades of wars
- ☐ Only oral literacy of ML, Dinka Language in a collective culture
- ☐ Once in Australia, hurdles included limited ML literacy, thus difficulties learning English literacy;
- ☐ Challenges of formal mainstream schooling
- ☐ To date no MELT Model exists for teachers of these secondary refugee students





## Aims, Theories, Methods & Findings

- ☐ For secondary teachers to **Understand** refugees' distinctive learning experiences
- ☐ How to **Engage** with these students and how to **Enhance** their Teaching and Learning towards achieving **learner Autonomy**.
- ☐ To devise a distinctive MELT model based on secondary data from previous research study using 2 Theories: **Humanistic Sociology & Symbolic Interactionism**
- ☐ **Open-ended Interviews** of 19 South Sudanese Refugee Secondary Students in Adelaide
- ☐ Refugees' non-linear paths of unique Phases of Learning indicate reliance on the Teacher, prior learning and visibility issues.



## Background

- ❑ A MELT model describing the refugee secondary students' **affective** as well as **cognitive** phases of learning could benefit their teachers' awareness of the students' learning journeys.
- ❑ The model would enable teachers to develop an appreciation of the students' capacity to reflect and gauge their own progress towards achieving autonomy as learners.
- ❑ To date there has not been a MELT model designed especially for refugees, nor indeed any secondary school students, to assist and inform their teachers.



## Background

- ❑ The South Sudanese refugees in South Australia were traumatised and distressed upon arrival from the continuing life experiences associated with war and dislocation in their country (Henley & Robinson, 2011; Joyce, Earnest, De Mori, & Silvagni, 2010).





## Background

- ❑ Their knowledge of the Dinka language, their mother tongue, was confined to oral rather than written expression and represented the strong oral tradition of their country over the past centuries (Perry, 2008).
- ❑ Their command of the English language was similarly limited to minimal knowledge, past use and fragmented formal 'schooling' (Sudanese Online Research Association, 2011).



## Background

Whilst Intensive English courses termed NAP (New Arrivals Program) (Department for Education and Child Development, 2016) have been offered for refugee secondary students in South Australia, the learning problems and challenges were often magnified once they enrolled in the mainstream secondary schools.



## Research Gap

- ❑ In the light of these serious linguistic and learning hurdles, little information is available concerning the personal learning styles or in MELT terms, the models of learning and teaching that engaged the South Sudanese refugee secondary students in Adelaide, South Australia.



## Research Gap

- ☐ A research gap exists in understanding the particular learning requirements of South Sudanese secondary students, originating in and driven by their authentic voices and views.
- ☐ There is a research gap as to refugee students' personal views on how they learn best and what learning problems they encounter.



## This research: a starting point

Since the MELT model has taken into account affective and cognitive facets, it can provide a useful guideline for educators of refugees in **all** sectors.





## Conceptual Framework

The theories of **humanistic sociology and symbolic interactionism** underpinned the original broad investigation into the students' cultural values and relationships in three contexts of learning:

- ☐ in southern Sudan;
- ☐ mainstream schooling in Adelaide;
- ☐ adaptation or otherwise into the Adelaide society.



## Methods

- ☐ Qualitative research
- ☐ Secondary data (Data were gathered for another study)
- ☐ Open-ended semi-structured interviews
- ☐ 19 South Sudanese refugee secondary students
- ☐ Interviews lasting an hour each
- ☐ The interviews were held in the students' schools
- ☐ The recorded interviews were transcribed and then analysed.



## Methods

- ❑ The analysis was done in terms of relating what the refugee students felt to be engaging learning and teaching to the MELT Model's original Facets of Research in their experience of schooling in Adelaide, in mainstream secondary schools.
- ❑ Students' actual words and phrases have been used in defining the various Facets of engaged teaching and learning in the Model (in the findings section).



## Findings

- ☐ Most students were limited to the oral rather than literacy of their mother language, Dinka and their knowledge of English was very limited.
- ☐ The school curriculum contained unfamiliar subjects.
- ☐ Their teachers expected completion of all school tasks and in the main 'assumed' the refugee students were capable of doing so.

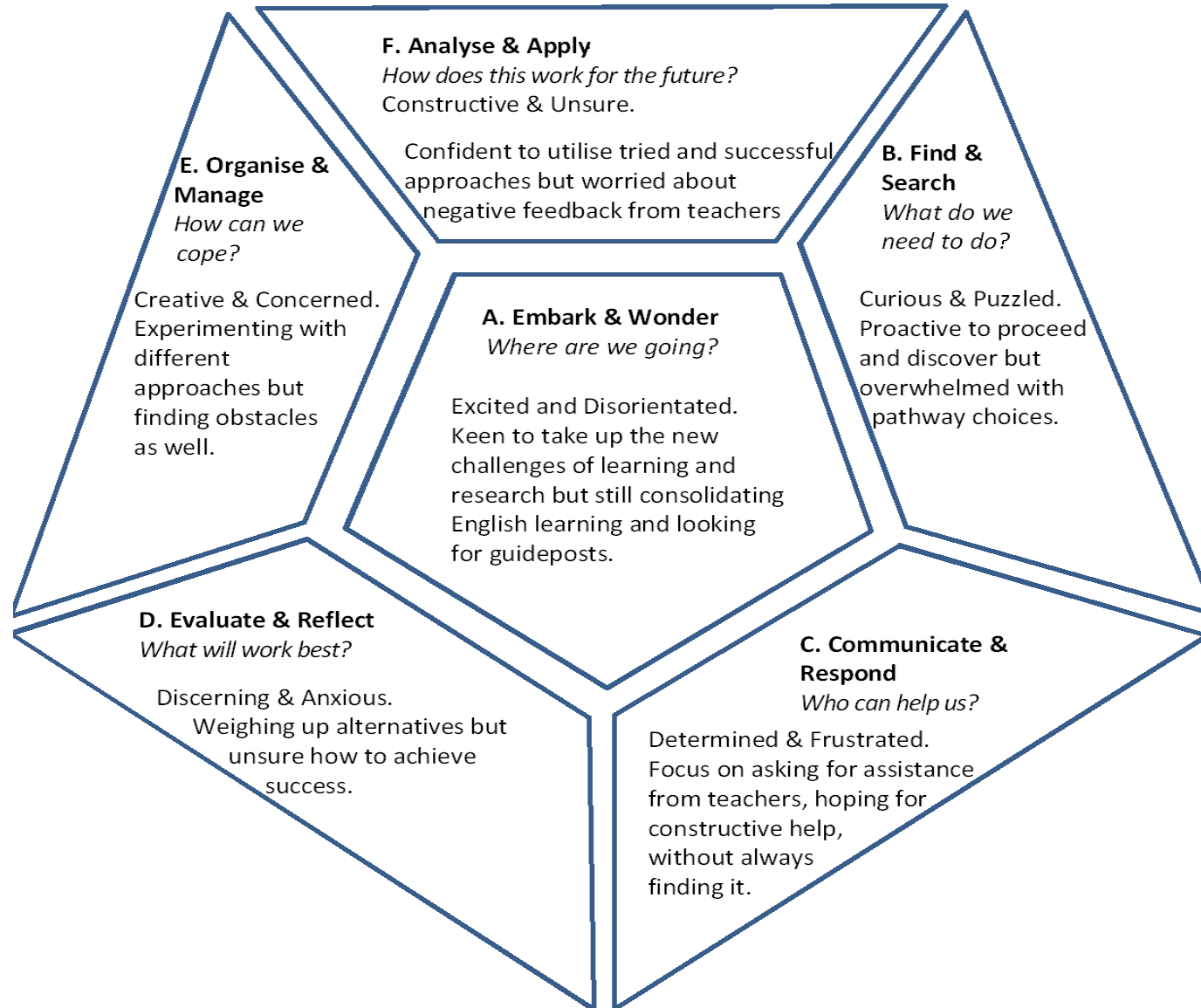


## Findings

- ❑ Figure 1 presents a MELT Model framework of the analysis of the students' comments on their experiences of learning and teaching in the South Australian classrooms.



# Figure 1: Refugee Secondary Student Perspectives on Mode Engaging Learning & Teaching (MELT)



Investigating Refugee Secondary Student Perspectives on Models of Engaging Learning & Teaching (MELT) was adapted from MELT by Judith Thomas, May 2017. See [www.melt.edu.au](http://www.melt.edu.au) and contact [Judith.thomas@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:Judith.thomas@adelaide.edu.au)



## Findings- Figure 1

- ☐ Each of the Facets A-F has been built up to capture the significance of the learning in the refugee students' own comments.
- ☐ Following the earlier models, each facet was given a title in terms of two verbs, explaining the key learning actions of each stage.
- ☐ A key question related to the learning stage was used as a subtitle.



## ● Findings- Figure 1

- ❑ The students spoke extensively of their feelings and have been captured in the model in the two adjectives which are used to highlight the range of affective responses in each facet.
- ❑ This MELT diagram therefore has been described and ordered in terms of all the refugee students' own perceptions of their learning in Australian schools.
- ❑ In addition, the number of times each facet was mentioned was recorded in a frequency count (Table 1)



**Table 1: Order of Frequency  
of each Facet in refugee student interviews**

Facet	Frequency for 19 students
<b>C. Communicate &amp; Respond</b>	<b>178</b>
E. Organise & Manage	145
F. Analyse & Apply	126
D. Evaluate & Reflect	123
A. Embark & Wonder	71
B. Find & Search	36



## Table 2: Typical Responses for Facets

Facet	Illustrative Comments
<b>C. Communicate &amp; Respond</b>	'History teacher [was] cheerful and fun..[but] some [teachers] just sit there' (LF15).
<b>E. Organise &amp; Manage</b>	'Everything [at home] was oral [and] very dramatic. In Year 7 I choreographed [the] whole Year 7 concert' (LF10).
<b>F. Analyse &amp; Apply</b>	RP: 'How can the quality of education be improved for refugee students?' (NM3).
<b>D. Evaluate &amp; Reflect</b>	'Easier for me to be independent' (NM4).
<b>A. Embark &amp; Wonder</b>	'Excited [upon arrival] ...[but] a lot of Caucasians, a lot of shock. We look different' (LM1).
<b>B. Find &amp; Search</b>	'Good...and bad teachers' (LM8).





## Recommendations

- ☐ Based on data containing the authentic views and voices of South Sudanese refugee secondary students, this new MELT model is recommended for teacher trial.
- ☐ Further experimentation could follow for the primary school and the various tertiary sectors as more students undertake higher studies in their quest for employment.



## Recommendations

- ❑ Understanding how these students view the support from teachers as crucial (Thomas, 2017, chapters 6 & 7), in their undertaking and managing their learning trials and tribulations, could provide a significant breakthrough for their unique contribution and welfare in Australian society and beyond.



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