

Troubling institutional assumptions
about cultural familiarity,
plurilingual strengths and
navigational capacity through the
lens of refugee students in higher
education: **What would an
integration model look like in
higher education?**

Dr Sally Baker
(UNSW, Chair, Refugee Education Special
Interest Group)



Acknowledgement of country


I acknowledge the Aboriginal nations as the First Peoples of Australia and thank them for their custodianship of this Land. I pay my respects to Elders past and present. I acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the Bedegal and Cadigal People of the Eora nation who are the Traditional Custodians of the land on which I work, and the Awabakal People, on whose land I speak from today. I would also like to extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are present here today.



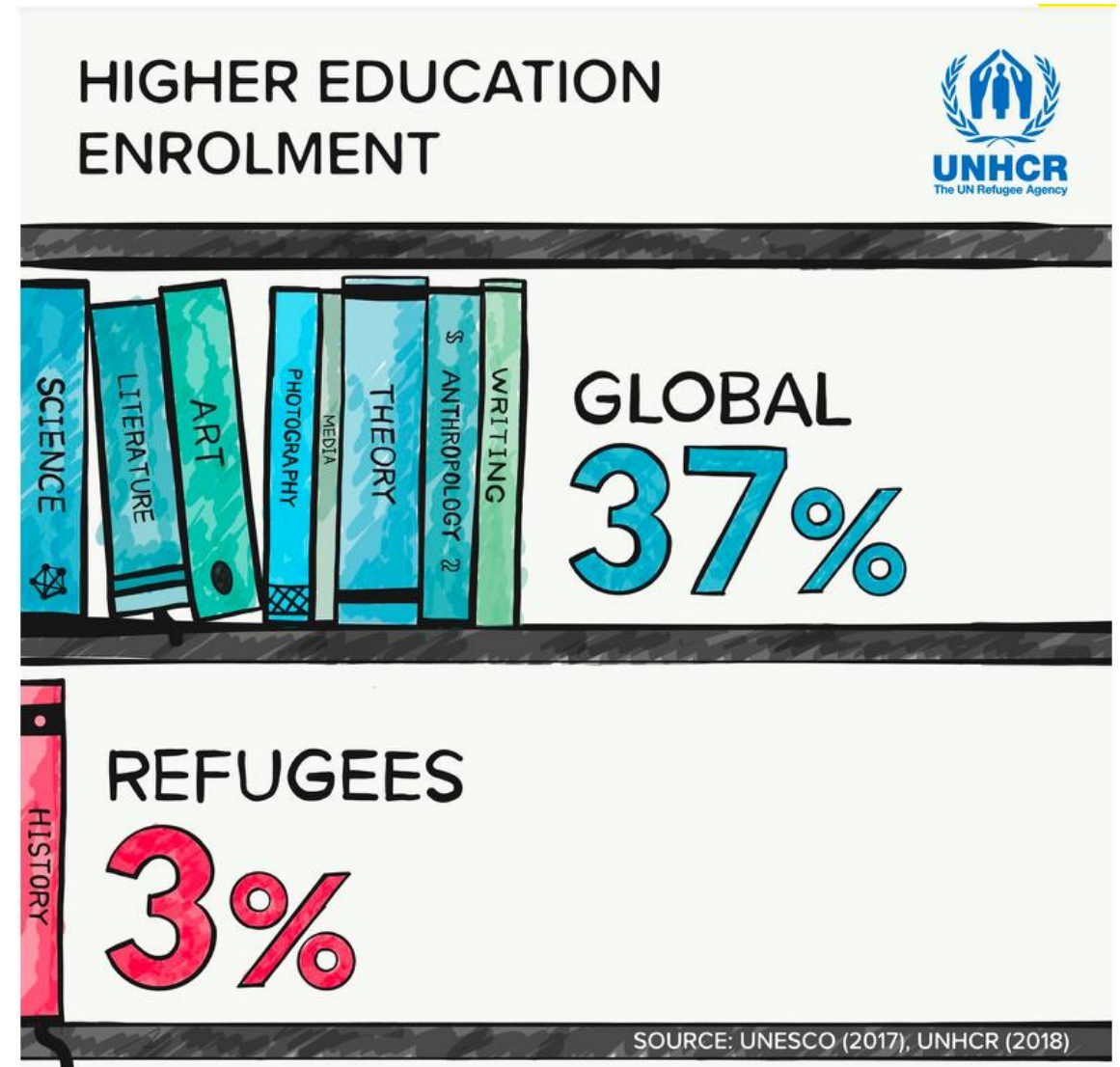


Outline of keynote

- Scope the situation for refugees and access to higher education
 - Explore the barriers caused by institutional assumptions
 - Counter the dominance of deficit narratives
 - Consider what integration models can offer higher education institutions for improving responses and practices
- 

Refugees and higher education: What do we know?

- 3% of the world's refugee population have access to higher education (UNHCR, 2019)
- Most of the 3% = accessing higher ed in settlement contexts
- Very few higher ed opportunities in displacement contexts



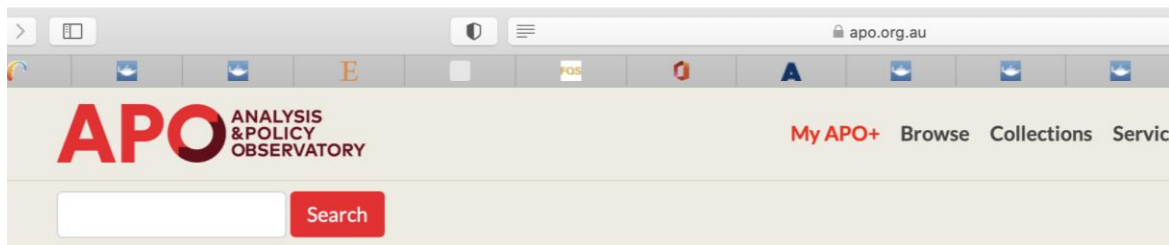
What's the problem?

- Access to higher education opportunities = integral to hope and future nation-building (UNHCR, 2018)
- UNHCR = target of 30% refugees enrolled in tertiary (VET + higher ed) by 2030
- Equitable access to quality education = SDG 4



Barriers to access,
participation +
success





> Resource > People from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds: an open access annotated bibliography

OTHER TEXT

People from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds: An open access annotated bibliography (3rd edition)



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People from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds: an open access annotated bibliography

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Sally Baker

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Refugee settlement Refugees Asylum seekers Forced migration Immigration CALD
Social inclusion

RESOURCES

↓ People from refugee and asylum seeking backgrounds: an open access annotated bibliography 13.96 MB

<https://apo.org.au/node/309849>

Based on extensive engagement with the literature...



So many
barriers...

'Classic' accounts of barriers and challenges in the literature + 'anecdotal':

- Language acquisition and proficiency
- Fragmented educational trajectories
- Impacts of trauma
- Academic literacy/oracy development
- Dissonant cultural frames
- Mismatches between home + uni
- Informational barriers

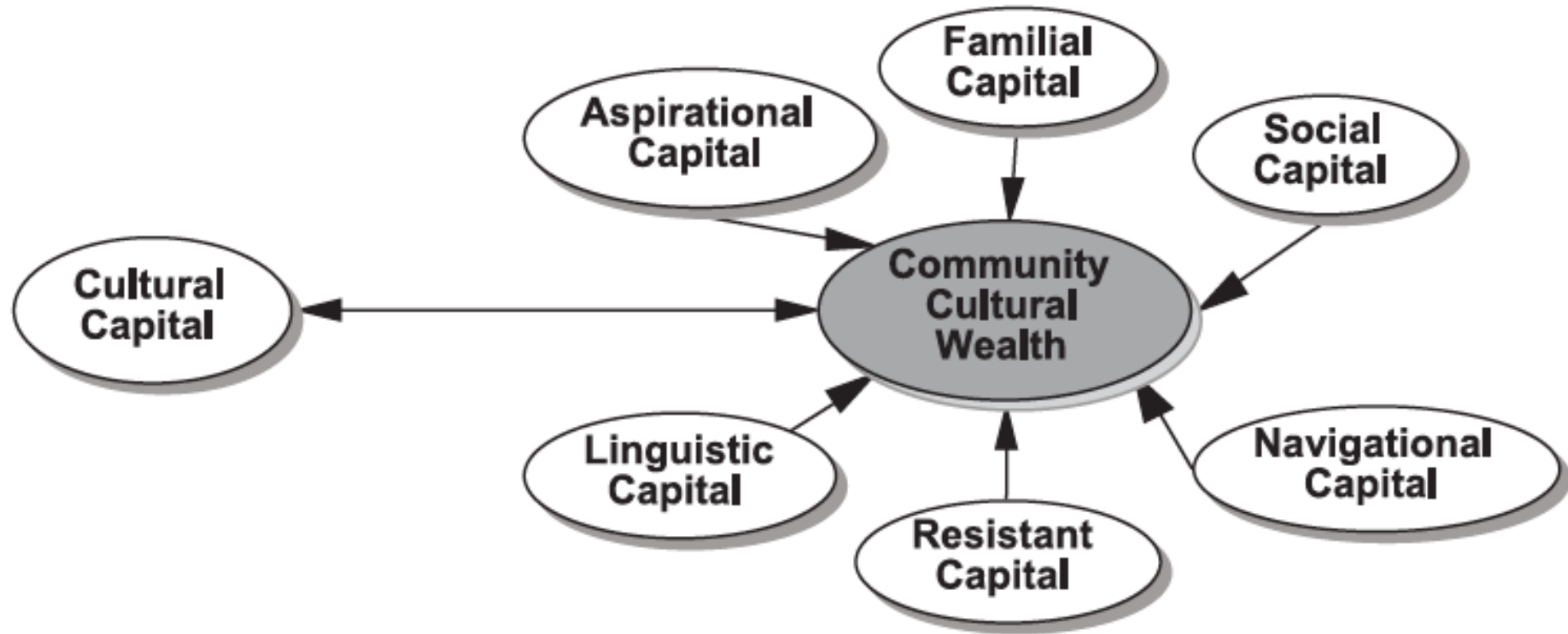
Root cause of barriers: institutional assumptions

- Institutional assumptions about who our students are, what they bring and what they want create significant challenges (Stevenson & Baker, 2018):
 - Institutional assumptions about familiarity with western education systems
 - Institutional assumptions about transitions and educational trajectories
 - Institutional assumptions about language and literacies



Institutional assumptions about who our students are

- Connects with broader concerns about 'massified' and 'diversified' higher education systems - through twin drivers of widening participation and internationalization (Gayton, 2019)
- 'Non-traditional' = new normal
- Traditional notion of 'ideal student' (school leaver, English speaker, middle class, aspirational) persists, despite hyper-diverse student (and staff?!) cohort
- **Zero recognition/ valuing** of what students bring (experiences, knowledges, languages)
- Assumption = students 'lack' capital




Counter-narrative:
Students' many forms
of capital

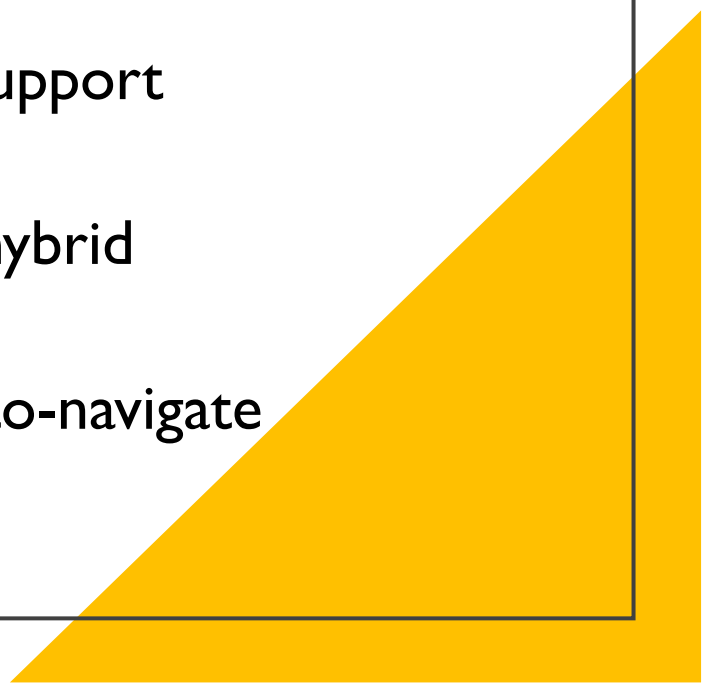
Students from refugee backgrounds have a wealth of resources/ community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005, 78) that they bring with them to their studies

A large orange circle is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially cut off by the edge. It contains the text 'Institutional assumptions about familiarity with western education systems' in white.

Institutional assumptions about familiarity with western education systems

- Tacit assumption #1 = all students are autonomous and have resources to self-direct if they need help
 - Tacit assumption #2 = systems and structures are clear and easy to navigate
 - Tacit assumption #3 = students have access to sufficient tour and map knowledge (de Certeau, 1984)
- 
- A series of four yellow dashed line segments are arranged in a curved, upward-sloping path in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Counter-narrative: students need and want navigational support

- Students need/ want brokerage: person-centred, people-rich supports
 - We know that students eschew 'cold', formal forms of support and dislike digital gatekeeping mechanisms
 - We know that instead students prefer 'warm' forms of hybrid support (Baker et al., 2018)
 - Universities need to understand that they are not easy-to-navigate spaces
- 
- A large yellow triangle is positioned in the bottom right corner of the slide, pointing towards the top right.

Institutional assumptions about transitions and educational trajectories

- Dominant institutional ideas about transition:
 - Linear
 - Ritualised/ predictable
 - Normative
 - As 'induction' (Gale & Parker, 2014)
 - Create 'stuck places' (Baker & Irwin, 2019)
 - Results in 'pedagogic frailty' (Gravett et al., 2020)
- CALDM/R students often get 'stuck' due to the "monolithic assumptions of what students bring with them and can do, and unrealistic expectations of individuals' capacity to help themselves without targeted and responsive supports" (Baker & Irwin, 2019, 17).
- Higher education timescapes are at odds with students' tempos and rhythms (Baker, Irwin, Freeman, 2019)

Counter-narrative: rethinking transition

- Transition = better characterised as rhizomatic, troublesome and 'becoming' (Gravett 2019):
 - Complex, multiple, individual, and heterogenous (Gravett et al. 2020)
 - Ongoing (not bounded to first year)
 - Represents a conceptual challenge to normative practices for 'managing' transitions

Institutional assumptions about language and literacies

- Dominant ideas position language in the academy as:
 - Neutral
 - Transferrable, conduit
 - 'Skills'
 - Students' responsibility
- Language and literacies are anything but!
 - Deeply contextual meaning making resources
 - Epistemological
 - Power-laden
 - Relational
 - Practices
 - Everyone's responsibility
- Entrenched monolingualism makes it much harder to recognise plurilingualism as **strength** rather than deficit
- Limited opportunities for 'linguistic hospitality' (Ollerhead & Baker, 2019)

Counter-narrative: Plurilingualism as benefit to all students

- Universities need to shift to understanding that plurilingualism is a great strength
- Translanguaging offers opportunities to permit students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire
- The potential of translanguaging pedagogy: unitary communication repertoire of plurilingual signs ([Ofelia Garcia](#)), working from 3 central elements:
 - Internal perspective of speaker
 - Language as unitary meaning making system of communicative potential
 - Reflect tangled cultural and linguistic worlds in which plurilinguals are always immersed





What can theories of integration offer higher education?

What do these assumptions tell us about higher education's capacity/willingness to support refugee students' access, participation and success?

Higher education works on assimilationist principles:

- Monologic, one-sided
- Demand for adaptation
- Giving up one's culture (and language) to 'blend in'
- Colonising timescape
- Assimilationist pedagogies (Manathunga, 2019)





Berry (1997): Acculturation strategies




Cultural plurality (multiculturalism): diverse cultural groups co-habiting but with different power dynamics at play ('mainstream'/'minority/ies')

Four strategies:

- *Assimilation* – “when individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identity and seek daily interaction with other cultures”
- *Separation*: “when individuals place a value on holding on to their original culture, and at the same time wish to avoid interaction with others”
- *Integration*, “when there is interest in both maintaining one’s original culture, while in daily interactions with other groups”
- *Marginalisation*, “when there is little possibility or interest in cultural maintenance (often for reasons of enforced cultural loss), and little interest in having relations with others (often for reasons of exclusion or discrimination)” (all p.9).

Berry points out that this model is based on an assumption of distributed agency; however, this is not the case. When the dominant group chooses, different terms need to be used: separation becomes *segregation*; forced assimilation moves from ‘melting pot’ to ‘pressure cooker’, which often leads to marginalisation.






Berry (1997) Integration



Integration depends on the openness of the host culture – mutual accommodation is needed (see p.10). Multicultural societies need pre-conditions:

- widespread acceptance of cultural diversity
- relatively low levels of prejudice
- positive mutual attitudes among cultural groups
- sense of attachment to broader society (see p.11)

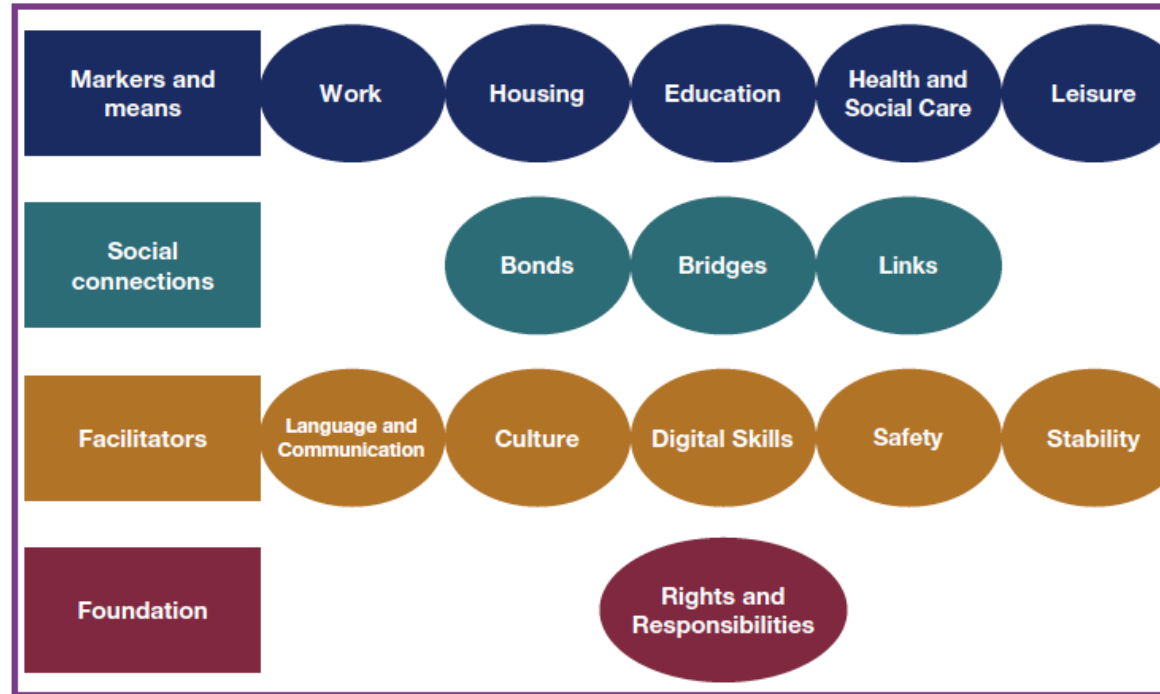
Integration can only be pursued when there is a shared desire to maintain cultural heritage (collective approach),



Integration (HOIf 2019)

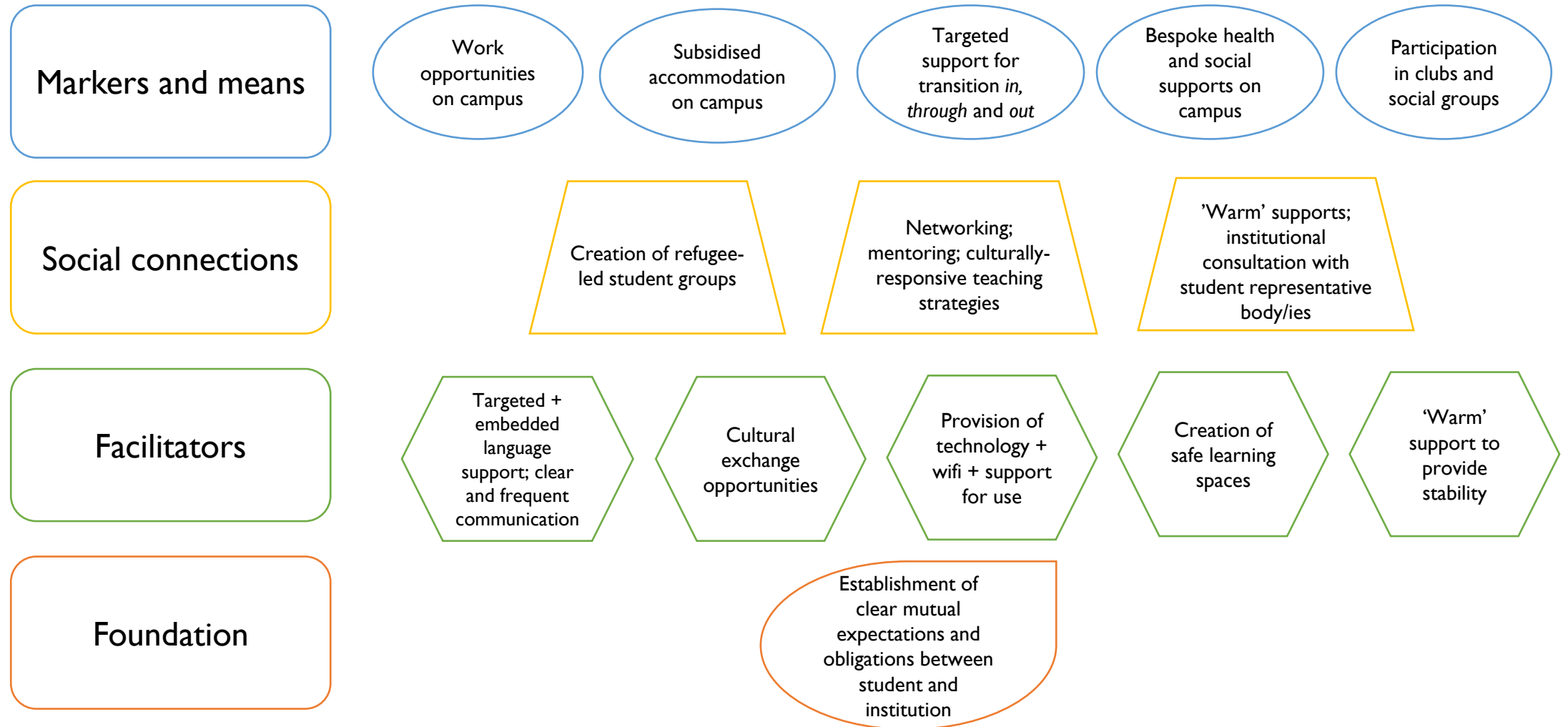
- “Integration is multi-dimensional –depending on multiple factors encompassing access to resources and opportunities as well as social mixing.
- Integration is multi-directional – involving adjustments by everyone in society.
- Integration depends on everyone taking responsibility for their own contribution including newcomers, receiving communities and government at all levels.
- Integration is context specific and needs to be understood and planned in relation to its particular context and within a bespoke timeframe” (UK Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019, 11)





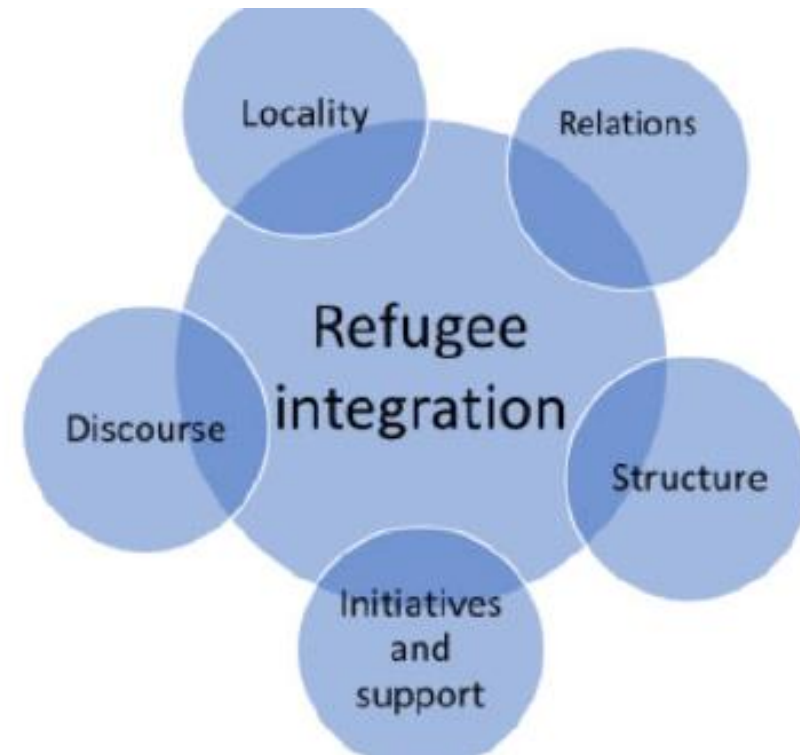
UK Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019: extended version of Ager & Strang's original version (2008)

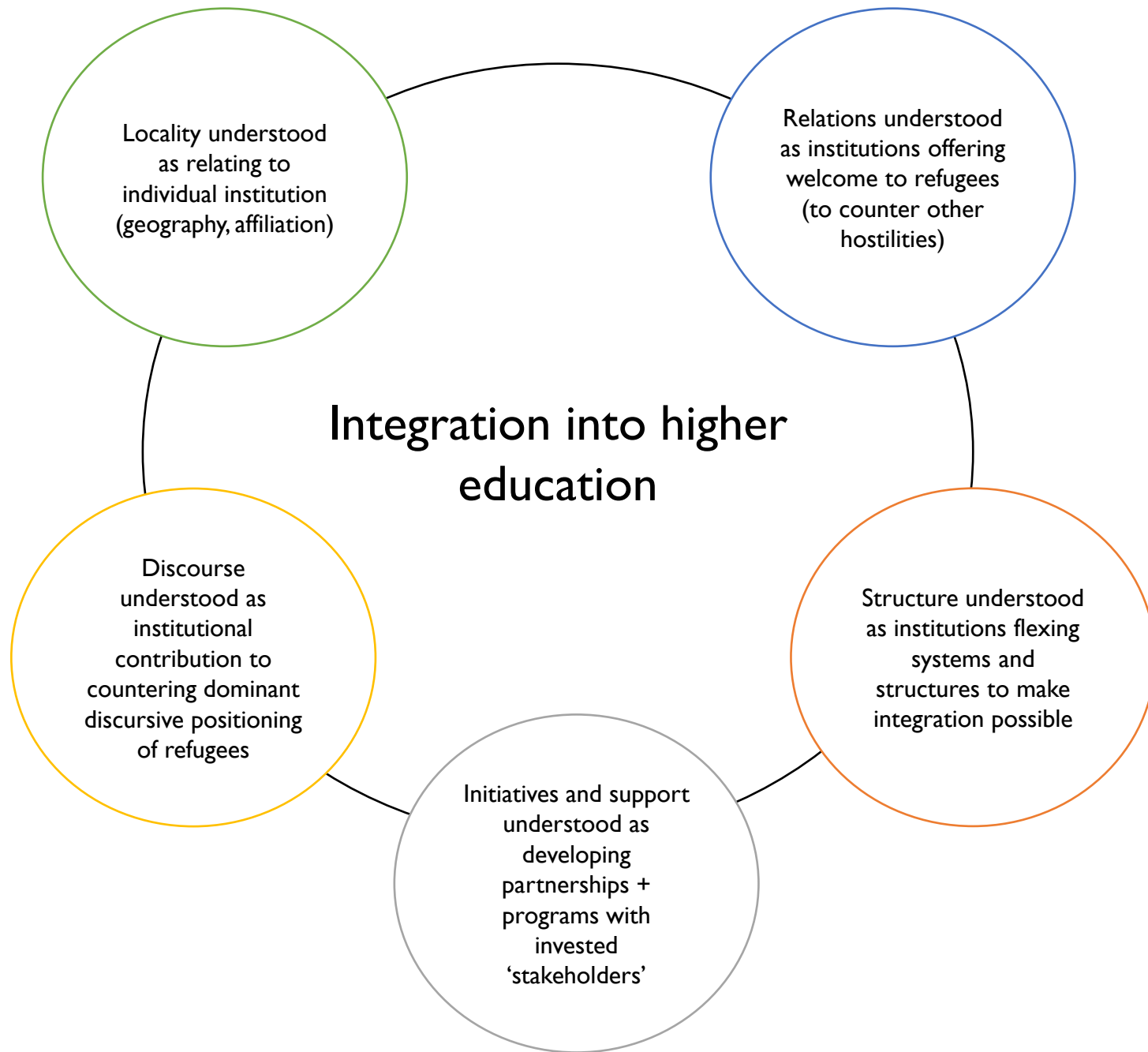
What would an integration framework for higher education look like?



What's missing?

- Phillimore (2020) argues that theories of integration place too much emphasis on refugees and not enough focus on receiving societies (and institutions)
- Phillimore brings the domains from the HOIf into dialogue with host opportunity structures





Adapting
Phillimore
(2020) for
integration
into higher
education



Next steps?

We must persist... (even/ especially after a heinous year!)

- “The transformation of HE into open, accessible, supportive, safe and successful spaces for refugee students requires collective institutional endeavours, including cross-sector collaboration...” (Stevenson & Baker, 2019, 118)
- Requires **macro** (inter/national), **meso** (sector) and **micro** (individual institution) level policy shifts
- Collective action and ongoing syndicated activism is needed
- COVID has provided the ruptures to the system lock-in (structural, cultural) = it's up to us to make compelling arguments for a shift against 'business as normal'
- We can only do this together – preferably at the über-macro (inter/intranational) level

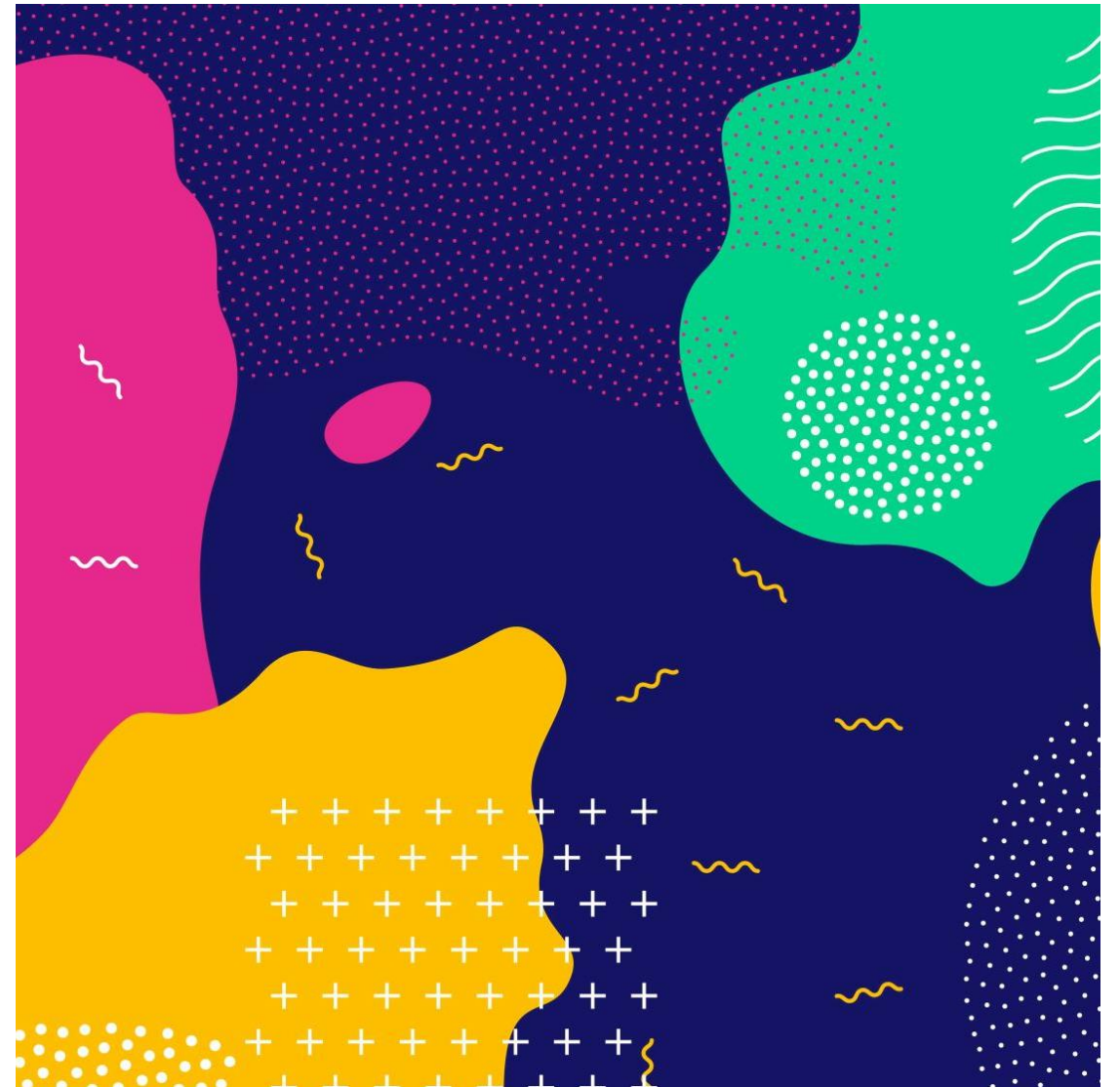


Refugee Education

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Sharing of Resources and Ideas
Membership is Free

To join: <http://refugee-education.org>
Email: contactus@refugee-education.org



Danke schön!

Any Questions?



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