**Towards Inclusive Classrooms – Video Transcript**

Queensland school communities are very diverse, catering to students from all kinds of backgrounds, meeting all these needs, can be challenging. Our educators need a solid understanding of how best to build inclusive communities.

There are some great things happening in Queensland state schools to support student diversity. Our department relies on research that uncovers some of this innovation to help shape future policy and practice across the state. It's all part of our focus on school improvement.

A team from QUT has been researching and learning about inclusive communities from staff and students at Milpera State High School. Milpera is a specialised school for students of migrant and refugee backgrounds. It offers English language development as well as settlement programs. Most students spend between six and eighteen months at Milpera before transitioning to mainstream schools.

Some of the children who attend Milpera have really confronted extreme challenges and, left unattended to, they would have a high rate of dropout. We assessed over 200 children and we were really struck by the fact that they seem to be doing better than we thought they might be doing in spite of their histories. The school achieved an attendance rate over 94 percent. Eighty percent of children were functioning within what we regard as very healthy levels with a good degree of resilience and it was that finding that then led us to start asking ourselves what is it about the school environment which appears to be therapeutic. In conducting the research the important point for us was to respect the voice of the children, the parents and the teachers, and to really privilege their perspective rather than our own ideas. To achieve this, we involved them in a creative process, which we call digital storytelling.

I belong to my family and to my parents.

We found that there were really three strategies, which we could distill from the interviews. The first was that it was important for students to feel safe have a sense of belonging and feel connectedness and that was really prioritised over all others.

Part of the role the teacher used to make sure that the students feel comfortable, feel engaged with the curriculum, which is tailored to meet student needs, and between those two elements that breeds that belonging and connectedness, that breeds a sense of respect, of kindness between staff and student, student to students.

I really feel like I belong here. It's kind of like everyone is the same and you feel like you are at home and you feel like you don't differ people, from their backgrounds. You just play them and enjoy the life everything.

The second strategy for promoting inclusivity was assisting students to adapt to the Australian environment.

One of the things that we do, I think, really well at this school, is we value very highly the first identity and culture of the students.

The school has a very active program, which includes people who speak the languages of the students. They have a laptop program. They take them out and teach them how to use public transport and generally provide those kinds of knowledges, which one needs to live in this kind of society.

Milpera State High School is outstanding in its two key focus points of having students develop their language capabilities with the English language and also settlement to Australia. And even though it's about English language acquisition, the second point of that settlement is where we nurture students belonging and connectedness to Australia, belonging and connectedness to education.

The third strategy involved students getting some degree of social support and feeling accepted within the community. This is fostered in a number of ways through the school. They have bilingual teacher aides, communication with the families. They have parent-teacher meetings and some education around social relationships.

When young people come from a refugee background and are newly arrived and have a myriad of settlement issues going on, they are navigating so many different things in their learning and so by supporting them and their mental health, we field and find regularly that they are much more available in the classroom.

We find that using creative therapies really helps them to settle better, helps them to process where they've come from and it helps them to feel more secure in the environment here in the school and start to build relationships and learn to trust people and really begin to imagine a future in Australia.

The research that was carried out at Milpera by QUT really affirmed the work that we do here at Milpera and it enables us to continue to use evidence-based practice and it values that evidence base which is so important in education. It also enables us to share our best practice with other schools.

It’s projects like these, happening across Queensland state schools, that are helping to give students from all backgrounds the best chance of succeeding at school and beyond.

To find out more, visit Research Services at <www.qld.gov.au/DETresearch>.