

The Importance of Educating Refugees

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The Syrian war, the overall increase in refugee flows over the last few years, and the participation of student refugees at all levels of education, has brought the important, ongoing issue of refugee education into the spotlight. Although education is a sovereign right of the refugee population, underpinned by relevant international law (UNHCR, 2000), many matters concerning the education of refugees continue to remain open. These include the search for better policies and strategies for the effective education of refugee students, ways of creating equal opportunities and social justice, and reducing the educational and social exclusion of people with refugee identity.

Critical multicultural education attempts to address such matters as the above (Fruja Amthor & Roxas, 2016), moving the centre of gravity away from older approaches of celebrating multicultural diversity towards much more critical choices that give the refugees themselves a voice. It condemns all racist views and attitudes towards the education of the refugee population and aims to effectively secure their right to education, not only in theory but also in practice.

The gap between theory and practice continues to be a major barrier to refugee education (McBrien, 2005). In official political discourse, both in international and national contexts, refugee education is an established right and opportunities are given to those who wish to be educated. However, in practice, there seem to be significant deficits which are

reflected in the high dropout rates of refugee students, their poor academic performance at school when compared to other students, and their significantly restricted access to higher levels of education and particularly to tertiary education.

On the one hand, these problems are linked to internal barriers that refugees themselves carry, most of which are consequences of refugee experience. On the other hand, educational policies do not support the educational and social inclusion of refugee students. They are lacking on issues such as the effective operation of reception classes, teacher training, the use of appropriate educational material, the teaching of the mother tongue, and the psychological and social support of students and their families. These are matters of concern that involve international organizations and state governments, as well as refugee related, non-governmental organizations and national and local bodies.

Schools and education systems of many Western countries try to support refugee students in various ways (Vogel & Stock, 2015; Grigt, 2015; Lopez Cuesta, 2015). Although, in many cases, the presence of refugees initially creates panic in the classroom and school (Ashworth Cain, 2017), educational organizations make efforts in a variety of ways

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to overcome language and culture barriers. However, as Bunar says (2015), they seem to do little to change their internal social and pedagogical practices sufficiently. They usually project external barriers, such as the large number of refugees, poor coordination and inadequate communication with educational counselors and supervisors, lack of appropriate resources and training. Also, they quite often isolate refugee students in separate schools or classes, use inadequate teaching methods or materials for this group, ignore their cultural references, and the conditions of life and education in their countries of origin (Dryden-Peterson, 2016).

Instead of taking care to create a framework, that will gradually and systematically support the educational and social development of refugee students alongside the whole student body, schools and teachers often maintain a superficial level of welcoming activities and projects for accepting diversity. However, this is insufficient for supporting the needs of refugee students' education. Without a doubt, there is good practice by some teachers in supporting the education of refugees. Nonetheless, it is clear that national governments must adopt policies and take steps to enforce the right to education for refugees and minorities, independent of the views and opinions of the teachers of a school (Banks & McGee Banks, 2015).

Moreover, as evidenced by relevant research (Magos, 2006), in many cases, teachers are not ideologically prepared to support their ethnically diverse students. They may have adopted negative perceptions and attitudes towards the presence of refugees and minorities in the classroom, expressing fears that the dominant national, linguistic and/or religious identity might be corrupted. A significant number of teachers continue to remain in the category of defense and surface educators (Dome et al, 2005), who believe that the 'other' students in the classroom represent a threat.

The basic education of candidate teachers and the systematic training of active teachers are

necessary conditions in order to support the transformation of negative views towards the other. In order for teacher education to lead to transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003), it is important that it has a strong experiential character, giving participants the opportunity to reflect on their views and attitudes towards otherness. Teachers' associations, which until now seem to have been invisible in the field of refugee education (Bunar, 2015), are now obliged to be accountable. They need to apply for training programmes, exploit possible self-education methods and exchange knowledge and experiences that will help to provide more effective education and support to refugee students.

The communication of all members of the school organization with refugee families and communities is another important tool for supporting the education of refugee students (Kranser & Pierre-Luis, 2009). Such communication can lead to the creation of a positive climate of acquaintance and cultural exchange, which may work constructively for both sides. It can reduce the fears of the locals towards unknown newcomers, leading progressively to breaking down the barriers, reciprocity and solidarity (Rollandi Ricci, 1996), as well as helping refugees in the process of social inclusion. In addition, the refugee community can act as a cultural mediator between the school and the refugee population, enriching the daily schooling with cultural experiences, as well as materials that can be used by teachers in their intercultural activities.

Although formal school education is the institution that receives the largest number of refugees, a significant number of refugees of different age groups participate in non-formal and informal education programs. The primary purpose of such programmes is to learn the language of the host country, but often also to teach subjects that will help the professional rehabilitation of refugees.

As in the case of formal education, the effectiveness of non-formal and informal learning processes depends on their context, the

needs of learners and the appropriateness of teachers (Simopoulos, Magos & Karalis, 2016). The latter, apart from other skills, need to have increased intercultural competence and empathy to help refugee learners overcome obstacles and difficulties and complete the educational process.

Some of the serious difficulties faced by refugee students are often those related to the availability of the basic necessities of life, difficult working conditions and insufficient study time. However, they often carry severe trauma and stress too (Margaroni, 2014). This originates in the refugee experience itself and what caused it, and from the often painful process of acculturation (Gibson, 2001; Mosselson, 2009). It is obvious that refugee education cannot ignore the trauma and so, it is important that appropriate psychological support is also offered, that can help the subjects overcome the trauma. Likewise, it is important that refugee education provides open access to the learning and teaching of the mother tongues and cultures of the countries of origin. In addition to being a basic right, providing access to education seems to work in supporting the improvement of the refugees' mental health and in their desire for integration into their new surroundings.

In the context of a fully functioning multicultural society, it is not the assimilation or exclusion of refugees that is the issue, but their inclusion in human rights based processes, which support the dignity of human life. The refugee should be seen as a vulnerable fellow human being who needs to be given the opportunity to make a fresh start. In reality, any of us could be in their position.

In this volume, researchers from Europe, America, Asia and Africa with long experience in refugee education present various aspects of formal education at all levels (nursery, primary, secondary and tertiary education) as well as non-formal and informal education.

The studies of Keri-Anne Croce, Nathern Okilwa, Laurent Gabriel Ndijuye and Nirmala Rao concern pre-school formal education. In her article, "Refugee Students Arrive at a School. What Happens Next" Keri-Anne Croce examines two and a half years in the life of a Maryland primary school as more than 60 Burmese refugee students join the population. She examines how interactions between refugee students, refugee families, teachers and a principal define a school community.

Nathern Okilwa's "Principal Leadership in Integrating Refugee Students at Northstar Elementary School" is a case study, which examines the role of the school leaders in the integration of refugees and their families. It discusses issues related to fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and educational programmes, and building relationships between schools and communities.

In "Pre-primary Education Policy in Tanzania: Does it meet the educational needs of newly naturalized refugee children?" Laurent Gabriel Ndijuye and Nirmala Rao take us to East Africa. Tanzania has hosted two million refugees over the last half century, of whom about 200,000 have been naturalized as citizens of the country. The authors study how the educational needs of naturalized refugees and other disadvantaged groups are addressed in the existing educational policy of Tanzania. They also investigate how the educational needs of naturalized refugee pupils are addressed in existing action plans and strategic documents.

The following studies concern primary and secondary formal education. Joanna Henderson and Eric Patrick Ambroso's "Teaching Refugee Students in Arizona: Examining the Implementation of Structured English Immersion" focuses on structured English immersion and the language policy that frames educational experiences for refugee students in Arizona. In particular, they discuss how teachers describe their experience of working with

refugee students in structured English immersion classrooms and how they are appropriating policies to meet the needs of refugee students.

Mario Schmiedebach and Claas Wegner present the project *Biology for Everyone* in their article “The Influence of Content-learning on the Integration Perspectives of International Students in Germany”. Here science is taught to secondary students entering the German school system, using action-oriented learning. They discuss issues such as how the students perceive the different learning environments in the international and regular class in regard to content learning and integration by the teacher and the classmates. They evaluate the content and language integrated learning (CLIL) concept of the science lessons as well as the concept of transitioning from action language to erudite language; and how they value their transition into the regular class.

Jill Koyama and Sowmya Ghosh in their article “Refugee Student Education: Spanning Boundaries by Building Relationships” examine the influx of refugee students in a school district. Through this influx, community-based organizations that provide refugee support services and local affiliations of international refugee resettlement agencies are brought into greater contact with the formal education system.

Three articles deal with the matter of refugee access to higher education in Germany. Michael Grüttner, Stefanie Schröder, Jana Berg and Carolin Otto in their paper “Refugees on Their Way to German Higher Education: Aspirations, Challenges and Support” focus on individual, social and institutional key conditions for integrating refugees into the German higher education system. They discuss how prospective refugee students value higher education and what the key challenges and supporting factors are, on their way to higher education in Germany.

Bernhard Thomas Streitwieser, Maria Anne Schmidt and Katharina Marlen Gläsener’s “I’m Good at Maths So Everyone is Nice To Me”

is an exploration of the needs, barriers, and support systems for students of refugee background at Berlin Technical University of Applied Sciences. It details the results of a study of 25 students of refugee background from Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan at two technical universities of applied sciences in Berlin who were participating in preparatory courses to matriculate or were already engaging in their first semesters of study. This case study shares what these refugee students feel they need, in order to succeed in German higher education, and what they see as barriers.

Olga Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, Roland Happ, Sarah Nell-Müller, Tobias Deribo, Franziska Reinhardt and Miriam Toepper in their article “Entry Diagnostics of Refugee Students’ Study Preconditions in an Online Study Program in Higher Education – Insights of the SUCCESS Project” present the new online study programmes offered on the Kiron Open Higher Education (Kiron) platform that provides refugees with access to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Using the results of Success and Opportunities for Refugees in Higher Education (SUCCESS) research project, which has been launched to investigate the effectiveness of new online study programs offered on the Kiron platform. They analyze refugee students’ socio-biographical and educational data such as gender, country of origin, highest level of education achieved etc. and examine their English language skills, intellectual abilities, and previous study domain related knowledge. They discuss implications for the effective and successful integration of refugee students in higher education in Germany.

The two next pieces are connected to non-formal and informal education. Rabia Hos’s “Learning to Teach in a Global Crisis: Teachers’ Insights from a Temporary Non-Formal Refugee Education Project in Gaziantep” reports one of the findings of a case study of a temporary non-formal education project. Learning Turkish focused on supporting 4-6-year-old Syrian children with Turkish language and literacy

development. Hos examines the teachers' and administrators' experiences in learning to teach young refugees in the time of crisis.

Mary Margaroni and Kostas Magos in their article "Refugee Experience and Transformative Learning" discuss how the refugee experience of new Afghan asylum seekers in Greece is a highly intensive process of informal education with significant transformational learning capabilities. During this transformation process, young refugees approach old and new reference frames in a comparative manner and identify problem areas that prevent them from operating effectively in the new social environment. They reassess, among other things, various aspects of religion, gender, intergenerational relationships and human rights, and offer themselves a margin of reflection and extension of their mental habits and attitudes.

Finally, in "When Youth Dialogue: A Pedagogic Framework for Changing the Conversation About Migration", researchers Elizabeth Ann Dawes Duraisingh, Sarah Sheya and Emi Kane present an empirically-grounded framework to help educators understand the opportunities and challenges of engaging youth around the topic of migration, including migration involving refugees. The authors present PROGRAM, an online learning community promoting intercultural inquiry and exchange among diverse youth, stressing the importance of inviting youth to dialogue in ways that involve slowing down, sharing stories, and making connections.

All the above papers map, in their own different way, different dimensions of the issue of refugee education. Although there are intersections between the studies and views outlined in the articles of this volume, each of them contributes significantly to the emergence of different aspects of this very topical issue. We hope that this volume will be a further step in the development of dialogue on the education issues of this vulnerable social group, and we

would also like to contribute to enhancing effective approaches to refugee education within the framework of the principles of critical multicultural education, and education for social justice.

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