



Refugees, interculturalism and education

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Refugees, interculturalism and education

The present special issue of IE, edited by Marco Catarci (Roma Tre University, Rome, Italy), Miguel Prata Gomes (Paula Frassinetti School of Education, Porto, Portugal) and Sávio Siqueira (Bahia Federal University, Salvador, Brazil), focuses on the sensitive issue of forced migration and education using an intercultural perspective. As is well known, the recent global increase of refugees deeply challenges the paradigm of education in current societies. Today, worldwide, there are 59.5 million individuals who have been forced to leave their countries of origin due to ‘push’ factors like persecution, civil war, discrimination or violation of human rights (Bhui et al. 2012; UNHCR 2015).

As spelled out by the UN’s 1951 Geneva Convention, refugees are among the most vulnerable individuals in the world, and in this movement, they have little or no choice, basically setting as a primary goal saving their lives. The Convention’s protocol defines a refugee as someone who

[...] owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/[her] nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail him/[her]self of the protection of that country. (UN 1951, 5)

Numbers reveal that, currently, the overall population of forced migrants around the world is some 14.4 million refugees, 1.8 million asylum seekers, 126,800 refugees who had returned to their country of origin in 2014, 32.3 million Internally Displaced Persons, 1.8 million who had returned to their home country in 2014, 3.5 million stateless persons and 1.1 million others of concern (UNHCR 2015, 8). The major contexts of humanitarian crisis from which refugees flee nowadays are Syrian Arab Republic (3.88 million), Afghanistan (2.59 million) and Somalia (1.11 million).

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the major flows of refugees certainly do not arrive in the most developed countries; they usually remain in areas close to the countries from which they have fled. By the end of 2014, for instance, developing countries hosted three quarters of the global refugee population. The main areas of reception of these vulnerable populations are Asia and the Pacific (hosting 26.8% of the global refugee population), sub-Saharan Africa (25.7%), Europe (21.6%), the Middle East and North Africa (20.6%) and the Americas (5.3%) (UNHCR 2015, 9). Half of the world’s refugee population is composed of children.

Bearing this in mind, it is important to highlight that such a reality poses an enormous challenge to the nations and educational systems that receive these groups of individuals. Consequently, it brings intercultural education to the centre of the discussion, and places the field at the core for developing concepts and strategies that can address the many issues inherent to this complex contemporary scenario, seeking to defy and overcome the sociocultural structures which create, among other things, discrimination, exclusion and subjugation (Fleuri 2002).

As Banks (2008) reminds us, more than ever our multicultural societies are faced with the challenge of constructing spaces that need to reflect and incorporate the diversity of their citizens, including those who cross their borders as refugees and immigrants. Global migratory movements are certainly not a new phenomenon. What makes such movements different nowadays is the sheer magnitude of the phenomenon and the strategies required to address the complex reality of the twenty-first century.

'Those who travel are human beings,'¹ even though 'host' societies tend to see them as faceless people, whose previous experiences, values, emotions, families and cultures are usually disregarded (Ayala 2004, 181). This special issue of IE tries to bring to the surface the many challenges related to refugees today. This special issue consists of a series of articles that focus on approaches and initiatives directed at refugees in different countries, using the prism of intercultural education. Additionally, this special issue highlights best practices/film reviews in order to offer possibilities to engage in creative and meaningful pedagogical work in humanistic, stimulating and transformative classrooms.

The special issue starts with the article *Making sense of collective identity and trauma through drawing: the case study of a Palestinian refugee student*, by Caroline Beauregard, Garine Papazian-Zohrabian, and Cécile Rousseau (Université de Montréal and McGill University, Montreal, Canada), in which the authors discuss the case of a nine-year-old Palestinian boy in Canada who expresses his multiple identities through drawings, revealing identity traumas that he attempts to heal through the opportunities provided by his teacher at school.

Lindsay Vecchio (Daytona State College, Daytona Beach, Florida, U.S.A.), Karamjeet K. Dhillon and Jasmine B. Ulmer (College of Education, Wayne State University, Detroit, U.S.A.) in *Visual methodologies for research with refugee youth*, drawing on Homi Bhabha's post-colonial 'Third Space' theoretical framework, propose to explore how refugee youth might benefit from visual methodologies, including photovoice, *fotonovela*, digital storytelling and quilting, addressing within these practices very significant issues like language, power, vulnerability and ethics, among others.

In *Reconceptualising refugee education: exploring the diverse learning contexts of unaccompanied young refugees upon resettlement*, Lutine de Wal Pastoor (The Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies, Oslo, Norway) explores unaccompanied young refugees' participation in various learning contexts beyond school through a study whose findings emphasise the need for a holistic approach to refugee education in and across contexts of learning.

Maria Hayward (Centre for Refugee Education, Auckland, New Zealand), in *Teaching as a primary therapeutic intervention for learners from refugee backgrounds*, proposes to examine the nexus between trauma and the pedagogical strategies, which could serve as therapeutic interventions for learners from refugee or traumatised backgrounds. Her main argument is that educators are in a unique position to use approaches that potentially support the well-being and confidence of refugees as well as enhance the likelihood of positive integration and inclusion in the new community.

In *Subjectivation, agency and the schooling of raced and dis/abled asylum-seeking children in the Italian context*, Valentina Migliarini (Università degli Studi di Roma Tre, Rome, Italy) addresses several challenges with the existing Italian education policies and practices for dis/abled asylum seeking and refugee children in the country. Founded on different theoretical frameworks related to Dis/Ability Critical Race Studies and understanding of processes of subjectivation, she analyses and discusses data that come from an ongoing constructivist grounded theory doctoral research project with asylum seeking children and professionals working in different refugee services in Rome, Italy.

Drawing on the Portuguese context, the authors of *The inclusion of the other in ourselves: reception and comprehension of refugees in Portugal*, Ana Vieira (Polytechnic of Leiria, Leiria, Portugal), José Carlos Marques (Polytechnic of Leiria, Leiria, Portugal), Miguel Prata Gomes (Institute of Philosophy, University of Porto, Portugal/Paula Frassinetti School of Education, Porto, Portugal), and Ricardo Vieira (Polytechnic of Leiria, Leiria, Portugal) discuss the current global refugee crisis, arguing that once aware of the challenges faced by host societies, the Portuguese civil society pioneered the creation of a *Refugee Support Platform* (PAR), an online course directed towards the reproduction of contexts and the sensitisation for the need to welcome and receive refugee families. Some of the results of the course are explored and discussed.

Miguel Àngel Essomba (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Catalunya) contributes to the issue with the article *The right to education of children and youngsters from refugee families in Europe* where he argues that the right to education of children and youngsters from refugee families is currently being violated in Europe due to factors like (1) a massive and uncontrolled arrival of refugee families and (2) an inconsistent assimilation of refugees as migrants in European nations. With this in mind, the author tries to explore whether the EU member states are taking these dimensions into consideration, providing information on the issue as well as a summary of the latest policy recommendations aimed at improving the present situation.

The final section of the issue comprises two examples of 'best practice' and a 'film review' on the theme. In *Intercultural integration of Arabic refugees in Berlin*, Hristo Kyuchukov (Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences, Magdeburg, Germany) and William New (Beloit College, Beloit, WI, U.S.A.) present a Berlin-based NGO which works with migrants and Arabic refugees, introducing and discussing a few initiatives which have been carried out by the institution, including an international conference dedicated to post-traumatic stress disorder, along with several German NGOs.

Laura López-Bech (European Youth Forum) and Rodolfo Zúñiga (ReRoute Sweden) author *Digital Storytelling: putting young asylum seekers at the heart of the story*, in which they share their experience in working with a method of digital storytelling with a group of young asylum seekers and refugees living in Belgium and Sweden. As they state, the project 'explores the need for adopting an intercultural perspective to our diverse societies by offering opportunities to get to know each other through personal stories, going beyond the surface, and thus [putting] the focus on the potential of "the other" in being an active part of the development of our common society'.

Last but not least, Marta Salinaro (University of Bologna, Bologna, Italy), in a very short, but inspiring review of the movie *On the Bride's Side*, by Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande, and Khaled Soliman Al Nassiry (2014), highlights that the documentary touches many sensitive issues once it denounces the horrors Palestinians have been going through in their everlasting search for peace.

All in all, it is an honour for us to edit an IE issue which covers this more than ever relevant topic for the entire global society. When there is human suffering wherever it may be happening, it is everyone's concern, especially at this moment when in many parts of the world metaphorical walls are being transformed in physical walls in order to prevent people from seeking a better life or even dream about a chance, a faint opportunity to survive wars, famine, natural disasters, economic tragedies, political and religious persecution, and so forth. This topic has to be part of our everyday agenda as it is, above all, our mission as intercultural educators around the planet to create, support and implement initiatives which will provide possibilities for those in need to move on with their lives and their dreams. We hope you enjoy the readings.

Note

1. *Los que viajan son seres humanos.*

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