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Improving the High School and College Classroom Experience for Learners with Refugee Status: Theory, Practice, and Change.

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Abstract

Refugee populations are increasing globally, and children make up more than fifty percent of those displaced. Unique experiences that come with forced migration including fragmented education, trauma, family separation, grief, and adverse other effects can impact learning in the classroom for refugee students. Existing data indicates that schools lack sufficient protocols to meet the needs of students with refugee status who consistently face risks associated with ill-prepared learning environments, and therefore must rethink possibilities to address this. By adopting strategic decolonized approaches, educational leaders can create supportive environments which improve instructional methods and learning outcomes for these students as they navigate colonized educational institutions to attain academic achievement. This conceptual paper utilizes decolonizing educational theory grounded within the context of recognizing intersectionality to identify the challenges faced by refugee students in secondary education and their transitions to college. The authors offer theoretical and practical recommendations to school leaders in order to support students who are refugees towards their educational goals.

Keywords: Refugee students, decolonizing education, secondary education, higher education, educational leadership

Statements and Declarations

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Recent global conflicts and pandemics have sent an influx of refugees to countries where policies support equitable opportunities, improved living conditions, prosperity, and protection from conflict and persecution. Although data regarding how educators navigate policy and issues surrounding refugee students is scarce (Koyama & Chang, 2019), educators seek insight to inform policy development for targeted support services for refugee students and families (Cerna, 2019). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) purported that by the end of 2020, there were 82.4 million forcibly displaced people in the world - and 35 million were children (UNHCR, 2021). Children represent less than one third of the global population, yet they make up fifty percent of globally displaced individuals (UNHCR, 2018). Some of these children arrive at schools in the United States (U.S.) where non-native English language learners are the fastest growing student group (DeCapua, 2016; Short & Boyson, 2012). Although data is limited, it is growing, and it indicates that schools lack sufficient protocols to address the needs of newcomer students who consistently face risks associated with ill-prepared learning environments (DeCapua, 2016; Pentón Herrera et al., 2019; Short & Boyson, 2012). This lack of preparation affects students with refugee status throughout their educational experiences in both childhood and adulthood.

In order to facilitate both increased understanding of and robust discussion surrounding the needs of students who also happen to have refugee status, this paper is presented to discuss ways in which educational leadership can strive to ensure optimal outcomes for this population. As refugees are resettled across the United States (UNHCR, 2021), this information is applicable to educational institutions in all parts of the country. Throughout this paper we utilize decolonizing educational theory grounded within the context of recognizing intersectionality to

offer theoretical and practical frameworks to support refugee student populations in schools, particularly within the context of secondary education and the transition to high education.

Background of authors

As co-authors of this article and researchers and practitioners in education, we recognize that our positionality informs the lens in which we come to education. Positionality is the hierarchical construction of self-identity based on transparent identifiers and informs our subjectivity (Alcoff, 1988; Rodgers & Raider-Roth, 2006). We must also recognize the ever shifting application of intersectionality for both the authors of this article as well as the people whom the theories and recommendations serve. Intersectionality being the intersection of the range of identities that an individual and/or community embody, especially those that are the subject of the problems of structural power (Carbado et. al., 2013). With this in mind, the following is an attempt to be transparent on the positionality of the authors:

Kayte Thomas spent her childhood overseas, primarily in South Africa, where she witnessed significant disparities which influenced her compassion towards refugees and desire to understand the human condition in a global context. She has both academic and employment experience with refugee populations. During her doctoral education, Dr. Thomas created a unique and replicable program designed to reduce barriers for students with refugee status to access higher education. She is a 3rd generation U.S. born, 1st generation college graduate, White, bisexual cisgender woman. Her first language was English but due to multiple moves, she learned a little of several languages and attended more schools than she can count - and does not think of any one place as “home” in the world. She is currently an assistant professor at a primarily online MSW program.

Sara-Jean, “SJ,” Lipmen was raised biculturally, Latina and Jewish, and multilingual, Spanish, English and Hebrew. Her family is from Mexico and Guatemala and she was the first of her immediate family born in the U.S. yet, presents as White. She is also the first to “go away” to college. She has lived in, taught and studied in six countries across three continents and has seen how immigration impacts education all over the world. She has taught for over twenty years, in urban and rural environments, and has had a focus on students who are immigrants and English Language learners. Dr. Lipmen currently works as an adjunct professor at the University of Southern California] and in a large school district in Southern California as a Newcomer Instructional Coach. She advocates for students who have recently arrived in the U.S. and provides professional development to the educators that serve those unique and inspirational students.

Definitions

Throughout this article, we strive to use person-first language to be more respectful and describe the people discussed rather than center on the identifying marker. The following is a list of terms and definitions used throughout the article.

- Students with refugee status - A student “who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion.” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1967 p. 3)
- Students who are immigrants - Students born outside of the United States and have immigrated at some point in their lives to the United States.
- Students who are newcomers or students that have immigrated recently - In contrast to students who are immigrants in general, students who are newcomers or that have

immigrated recently are time bound, having had their immigration experience and arrival in the United States within the previous three years.

- Students who are English Learners: students who have difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language (Non-Regulatory Guidance: English Learners and Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2016)

Theoretical framework

Education is a powerful influence used to reinforce colonial ideas within society, and therefore must be challenged in order to create equity in society. Colonial ideas are rooted in white supremacy and designed to maintain control of oppressed populations (Masta, 2019). This is particularly relevant when discussing the educational needs of students with refugee status in Western settings as curriculum created in the Global North does not often correlate to experiences or needs in other parts of the world (Spiegel et al., 2017). Given that the United States was quite literally formed by colonizers, and colonial ideology is utilized to maintain control over forcibly disenfranchised populations, it is imperative to understand that the nation still has deeply entrenched colonized beliefs (Masta, 2019). The concept of decolonizing education stems from feminist pedagogies which criticize ideas such as empowerment when framed within patriarchal structures that persist within many academic spaces (Schroeter, 2019). Decolonizing education involves intentionally disrupting power and control in order to change dominant narratives (Razack, 2009; Spiegel et al., 2017; Masta, 2019), restructuring not only the curriculum but the entire approach to education as well.

A key aspect of colonized education is the impression that Western ideals are optimal, and therefore, within a decolonization framework, this should be avoided in the classroom

(Razack, 2009; Masta, 2019). To combat this, education must be transformative and teach students about critical analysis, resistance, and reclaiming their own agency (Dei, 2016). It is possible to begin with more easily accepted concepts such as intersectionality to disrupt colonized ideologies by resisting imposed norms. As we resist White, heteronormative constructs of gender and race it gives way to resistance of other narrowly applied social constructs as well (McShane, 2011). This challenges colonized ideals while maintaining an anti-oppressive stance and challenging heteronormative patriarchal ideals (Dei, 2016; Masta 2019). In contrast to colonized educational standards, a key aspect of decolonized education is the rejection of the notion that there is a universal experience (McShane, 2021).

Another aspect of decolonizing education is awareness of the impact various pedagogies may have on all students. A critical concern for educators is caution around re-traumatizing students by allowing the teaching space to reinforce colonizing ideology. It is important to be mindful that global lessons may have personal relevance to international students, particularly students with refugee status who may have been disproportionately impacted and harmed by the effects of colonization. Students with refugee status may find that their experiences are included in lesson plans surrounding issues such as war, poverty, and humanitarian aide but portrayed from a viewpoint they do not recognize (Razack, 2009) - often entrenched in narratives which are negative towards refugee populations (Koyama & Chang, 2019). As such, it is necessary to address a variety of interpretations of events (Razack, 2009). Decolonizing means prioritizing an indigenous perspective (Dei, 2016; Masta 2019), which for those who are refugees means prioritizing their perspectives.

A commitment to decolonized educational practices must include reflexivity and critical assessment of one’s own social location in conjunction with learning and unlearning (Dei, 2016;

Absolon, 2019; McShane, 2021). It is necessary for both instructors and administrators to understand their own involvement – both personally and nationally – in issues of global importance (Razack, 2009) and it is important to train faculty and staff to increase understanding of the refugee experiences and ways this can complicate their learning in a higher education setting (Hadas & Battle, 2021). In addition to reflexivity for staff, curriculum planning must include reflexive learning to ensure connection to concepts in ways that are unique to each individual student. (Dei, 2016). Decolonizing education also means confronting racism which has formed educational practices at the expense of those who are non-White (Schroeter, 2019; Masta, 2019). Whiteness often thrives on competition and hierarchy - and thus so do colonized educational practices - which may feel foreign to students who are refugees whose cultures often come from a collectivist background. Educators must instead strive to process various stereotypes and prejudices while allowing space for students to juxtapose their experiences with dominant narratives (Schroeter, 2019).

Refugee issues are frequently framed in helper narratives where those in power are generously gifting the opportunity to be refugees to those fleeing persecution (Koyama & Chang, 2019; Arat-Koc, 2020). These frameworks effectively disempower refugees and create expectations of gratitude from the nations which often caused their displacement in the first place, further reinforcing the colonized perspective (Arat-Koc, 2020). Part of decolonizing education means increasing access to education (Achille, 2016), which includes access for refugees who are historically and currently marginalized from educational spaces. Decolonizing academia means intentionally diverting away from Western/Eurocentric epistemology (Achille, 2016; Zidani, 2021). Some experts consider this academic gatekeeping of knowledge a form of structural violence. To decolonize the classroom means to break the cycles of the academe and

actively resist recreating processes which marginalize others (Zidani, 2021). It is an ongoing process of reorganizing and restructuring academia (Achille, 2016).

To reject decolonizing practices is to choose practices which subject students in oppressed populations to ongoing violence in the classroom space (Absolon, 2019). Therefore, educational leaders must consciously commit themselves to action which intentionally disrupts oppressive forces to create equitable spaces for students with refugee status within all classroom settings. It is with this spirit of resistance that the following information is presented to guide educational leadership into their interactions with and planning for students with refugee status at various stages in their educational journeys.

Challenges facing Refugee Students in Secondary Education

There are myriad challenges that students with refugee status experience within existing paradigms of education and the broader social system as whole. These challenges present significant barriers to achieving equitable educational status with their non-refugee peers. The section below outlines these challenges, including literacy at the center of education, how current systems are in place to support students overall, such as Title III for English Language Learners and Title I for students who are low income, yet these systems do not address the unique needs of students who are refugees with unaddressed trauma that does not support student learning both within the current paradigm of secondary education, as well as in the goal of decolonized education.

Literacy

Literacy is culturally relative (Harste, 2003) and is a major focus of education pertaining to refugee students from a colonized mindset. Within the context of the current educational system in the United States, written literacy is highly valued (Lee, 2011). Title III has

legislatively canonized the need for students to have written, reading, speaking and listening skills in English. Title III stipulates "immigrant children and youth attain English proficiency and develop high levels of academic achievement in English" (*Title III-Language instruction for English learners and immigrant students,* 2019, Part A, Section 3102, para 1). This directive emphasizes that in U.S. schools that are publicly funded, accountability of literacy in the English language is imperative. Title III is the funding framework that public school educators must work within, and is an example of how decolonized education ideals clash with policy expectations.

Although it is standard practice, the model of emphasizing written English literacy at the center of successful educational practices is problematic in various ways. These challenges include perspectives of students who are refugees, problems centering on written literacy and looking at the changes, and losses and mournings that those who have emigrated endure. The emphasis on literacy can also be contrary to the decolonization of education. Literacy is socio-culturally relevant; the emphasis on written literacy superior/inferior dichotomy between cultures that emphasize written literacy over oral literacy can further marginalize students (Lee, 2011). This would be particularly important for students whose immediate background, culture, context, country and language that they have immigrated from emphasized oral literacy over written. Within the context of decolonizing education, the need for written literacy can further marginalize already vulnerable students.

U.S. schools use varied interventions, tools, and methods to improve students' language literacy learning experiences (Short & Boyson, 2012) in preparation for life beyond the classroom. Literacy is just one aspect of the systemic colonized framework that many refugees must contend with. Systemic issues such as lack of proximity to well-funded schools, legal

challenges, cultural expectations, and confusion around navigating organizations all provide barriers to accessing equitable learning experiences for students with refugee status. Although students with refugee status are afforded educational access by law, they often encounter unequal access to education than non-refugee students because of these barriers (Koyama & Chang, 2019).

Lack of Access for Refugees Students to Curriculum

Students who are newcomers often struggle with reading and writing, and a large number are perceived as having lower non-language academic skills than their U.S.-born peers as demonstrated by disparities in English learners (ELs) and non-ELs in Advanced Placement (AP) classes (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Program Studies Service, 2016). When refugee families relocate to the United States, they are placed in urban centers with higher concentrations of low-income schools (UNHCR, 2018: UNHCR, 2021). These schools mostly offer basic-level and remedial courses, but not Advanced Placement (AP) courses (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Program Studies Service, 2016). So schools with high EL populations often lack representation of ELs in AP courses because these schools do not offer them, even though some EL students may qualify for advanced non-language courses such as math (U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development and Program Studies Service, 2016). Due to the placements and lack of knowledge around the English language, students are often not given access to courses that are considered higher achieving and, in turn, their funds of knowledge are devalued.

Access to Services Needed to Succeed

When integrating students who have refugee status into school communities, some argue that addressing base needs within Maslow's hierarchy[1] is essential for student success (Norte, 1999; Rossiter et al., 2015). Maslow's hierarchy differentiates between basic physiological needs, such as food, water, shelter, sleep, safety and security and growth needs which include esteem, love and belonging. Maslow (1943) contends that humans will seek out the basic needs before addressing the growth needs. All students, including those who have recently arrived in the U.S., need to have their basic physiological needs met prior to being able to learn and grow within the school community. It is important to note, however, that those with refugee status may have different expectations for basic needs than the dominant society, which must be taken into consideration in a culturally appropriate manner (Naidoo, 2021). Schools in the United States strive to meet some of the physiological level needs, yet systematically, often fail to address other needs in order to set the students up for success. For example, the National Lunch Program provides students with breakfast and lunch at PK-12 schools (National School Lunch Act and Child Nutrition Act, 1977) yet, other needs must be met as well in order to foster success.

Needs that are often not addressed include safety and security level, including dimensions of immigrant status itself, such as not knowing if they will receive immigration relief through asylum or be forced to return and/or become undocumented. In order to have the other needs met, strong social support networks and community programs with partners are necessary for students to have these needs met (Rossiter et al, 2015). In addition, mentoring and one-on-one

[1] Maslow's hierarchy is considered by some to be heavily influenced by, and a misunderstood version of, the indigenous Blackfoot perspectives about social connection. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address this, but the reader is encouraged to seek out more information about the possibility that he did not properly attribute this work to the tribal engagement he had and thus is an example of the imbalanced power dynamics so frequently seen in academia which cause harm. (See Blood & Heavy Head, 2007; Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020; Kapisi et al., 2022)

relationships are important for students to feel security and safety in order to then address high needs of belonging (Norte, 1999; Rossiter et al 2015).

Esteem needs such as parental expectations are often a barrier to learning as well. Parents, other family members, and guardians may have both unrealistic expectation of their children or expectation that the recently arrived immigrant youth need to contribute to the family financially (Conway, 2012; Eriquez, 2011; Perreira et al., 2006; Quiocho & Dauod, 2006; Velez, 1989). Additionally, when families must work within existing colonial-based structures, they find it difficult to advocate on behalf of their children because of lack of knowledge of the educational system, access to mainstream English curriculum, and tracking concerns (Callahan, 2005; Quiocho & Dauod, 2006).

Trauma

Many refugee students have experienced varying degrees of violence and trauma (Bajwa, 2017; Tulaio, 2017), which may include trauma from experiences in their countries of origin, experiences during their journeys to the USA and/or being detained by immigration services upon their arrival (Bronstein et al., 2012). Students with refugee status may experience adverse psychological impact from their refugee journeys (Odette, 2019), and lack of trauma-informed spaces can exacerbate concerns which prevent educational attainment (Maringe et al, 2017; Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). The trauma load is often not addressed within educational systems or supports provided and schools have various barriers to social services including confidentiality and understanding of institutional and partnership organizations' roles (Bronstein et al., 2012).

In addition to violence and traumatic events that many refugees endure, there is a unique set of circumstances, including ongoing and repeated losses and mournings that are unique to refugees. The work of González-Calvo (2005) addresses the migratory mournings or losses that

refugees face. Migratory mournings are themes that exist in the process of moving from one country to another. One of these losses is that of language, which, as discussed above, schools unintentionally reinforce and re-traumatize by mandating literacy in the new language. There are eight additional potential losses: 1) Family and friends: many refugees are separated permanently from some or all of their family and lose their networks of familial support and friendships. 2) Culture: including the values and customs that were inherited and learned prior to their forced migration. 4) Land: "in a broad sense: the landscapes, the colors, the smells, light" (González-Calvo, 2005 p. 85) that are amplified for some refugees who feel oppressed by the new landscape. 4) Social status: not only the change in social status that the individual experiences, but also, the understanding and behaviors within social status structures. 5) Ethnic belonging, having a group which includes your genetic self identification that no longer exists in the new context and/or only exists at a far away distance. 6) Physical risk, including the experience of war, regular violence and the decision to travel at the risk of safety and health. 7) Loss of the "immigrant dream", the realization that the goals and objectives that the refugee might have had upon arriving might be be attainable in the intended course of actions and finally, 8) The inability to return, because becoming a recognized refugee often means that the person is never able to return to the country from which they fled.

These migratory mournings - when identified in combination as unique stressors that influence behavior and cause a deep mourning - are known as Ulysses Syndrome. This Syndrome is unique to the twenty-first century due to the specific traumas that have been imposed by the Global North on refugees in the past few decades including separation of families and criminalization of immigrants (Achotegui, 2019). Interventions with refugee populations must account for these migratory mournings in order to support the whole individual

and promote healing (Roberto & Moleiro, 2016). Educational institutions and current structures fail to address these losses. The above factors point to a need for specialized training of educators, including trauma informed practices, and psychological programs to support immigrant and refugee students more holistically in order to prevent further damage (Hodes, 2010).

Addressing the Needs of Students with Refugee Status For College Access

While substantive studies exist examining refugee experiences in primary and secondary educational settings, there is limited insight continuing on into higher education settings (Naidoo, 2021). When transitioning from secondary education to college, additional challenges arise for refugee students. In contrast to their non-refugee immigrant peers, refugee students transition to college education at much lower rates than their immigrant counterparts (Phan, 2018; Streitwiser et al., 2019; Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). Additionally, over 70% of students who are refugees dropout of high school (DeCapua & Marshall, 2015) which means that these learners are even more significantly disadvantaged when discussing college access. As discussed above, creating a network of community partners (Rossiter et al, 2015) and including psychological services (Mancini, 2020) can lead to higher graduation rates and matriculation to higher education. The sections below describe how educators can support transitions to higher education for refugee students.

Barriers and factors affecting college access

Students with refugee status disproportionately lack access to college education, despite having a desire to attend (Crea, 2016, Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). Only 1% of refugees have access to college education compared to nearly 38% of non-refugee immigrant students (Phan, 2018; Streitwiser et al., 2019; Bauer & Gallagher, 2020) although that number has very recently

increased to 3% which indicates a positive upwards trend (Hadas & Battle, 2021). Refugees are a distinct category from other migrants (Maringe et al., 2017; Koyama & Chang, 2019), and treating them as international students without further support regarding their refugee status and experiences creates hardship and marginalization (Maringe et al., 2017). Even before arriving at college, refugee students often struggle in high school and are more likely to drop out of both high school and college courses, which impacts the trajectory towards attaining a college degree (Bajwa, 2017; UNHCR, 2019). The experience of being a refugee can complicate access to higher education due to loss of access to secondary education and thus necessary credentials for entrance as well (Maringe et al., 2017). There are several barriers to accessing a college education for refugees including structural barriers, financial barriers, accreditation issues with their previous course work overseas, and lack of understanding of institutional requirements. (Crea, 2016; Roberto & Moleiro, 2016; Maringe et al., 2017; UNHCR 2019; Jungblut et al., 2020; Hadas & Battle, 2021). Additional concerns include lack of access to required technology and lack of appropriate documentation needed to enroll (Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). However, these issues rarely exist independently and may layer upon each other to create multiple barriers (Lambrechts, 2020).

Access to education for refugees is a matter of social justice concern (Maringe et al., 2017; Phan, 2018), and can protect those resettled from being further marginalized (Avery, 2017) and act as a buffer against mental health concerns while increasing coping skills and confidence levels by providing tangible pathways to socioeconomic success (Maringe et al. 2017; Hadas & Battle, 2021). Refugees have more complex needs and barriers to college education than their immigrant counterparts do, as immigrants are usually able to prepare for leaving their countries. This means that immigrants are able to maintain their wealth and possessions and often do not

have the complex trauma histories that refugees do, making their assimilation into a new country easier (Bajwa, 2017). Unique experiences that come with forced migration ranging from fragmented education, trauma, family separation, grief, and adverse health effects can impact learning in the classroom for refugee students (Tuliao, 2017). To compound these issues, recent increases in anti-refugee attitudes have surged worldwide, causing further apathy towards the higher education needs of students with refugee status (Lambrechts, 2020).

Conflict and displacement by nature separates individuals from academic settings, which not only alters the individual's life trajectory but also disrupts the economy in future years as portions of the population lose access to ongoing education. In refugee contexts, this affects both the country of origin and the host country in which people are resettled. Higher education protects against that by providing those impacted with necessary skills to remain competitively active in the workforce. Therefore, refugee education can and should be part of an ongoing peace building initiative as refugees are welcomed to and protected by their new society (Avery, 2017), which ultimately benefits the nation as a whole, as a more educated population improves outcomes for the country overall (Bajwa, 2017). Colleges can have a significant impact on both local and global contexts when understood through this perspective.

However, college campuses have not accommodated refugee needs to help them to achieve their educational status (Odette 2019, Bauer & Gallagher, 2020), and little attention is paid to their specific mental health needs – which may act as a barrier to degree attainment (Odette, 2019). Many of the processes of higher education can be retraumatizing, and re-stigmatizing, to refugees. These include barriers such as cost, language, lack of trauma informed spaces, cultural mismatch (lack of cultural competency by the university and professors), and more (Maringe et al., 2017; Naidoo, 2021). Additionally, some institutions and governments may

feel that it is unnecessary to focus on college access for those with refugee status as the designation of "refugee" is seen as temporary and therefore inconsequential in the overall need hierarchy in higher education (Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). Despite this, refugees continually stress the importance of higher education to their sense of wellbeing. Many in higher education endorsed feelings of empowerment and ability to improve their families and communities directly with their educational knowledge. Besides gaining knowledge, they noted an increase in language and interpersonal skills as well as leadership and self-awareness (Crea, 2016). Thus, educational access results in expanded professional opportunities, broader worldviews, deepened empathy, and a greater sense of hope for the future (Crea, 2016, Bauer & Gallagher, 2020).

Holistic scaffolding and supports

There can be resistance to refugee integration by community members, especially if there are racist or xenophobic viewpoints in the community (Roberto & Moleiro, 2016; Vickers, 2017). This might even include peers at the high school or collegiate level who feel that refugee students are receiving an unfair advantage because of the provision of specialized support. Research has demonstrated that educational programs promoting intercultural exchange can improve understanding and empathy and reduce resistance. As there is limited focus on developing this exchange in higher education, more attention is needed in this area to continue to improve such relations (Vickers, 2017).

Many college students with refugee status feel that they would benefit from one on one support by a person designated to answer questions and assist them with navigating the college process. A common experience is a lack of access to the information needed to feel fully prepared for college, and there are no formal supports in place to assist with navigation. Social services and college campus supports are frequently unavailable to meet these needs, and when

students with refugee status are able to access these they frequently feel that the information received was unhelpful or inaccurate (Bajwa, 2017). Mentoring can be an important aspect of the refugee collegiate experience, as it can provide robust support and connections to peers and leaders. This also aligns with appropriate changes in a decolonized approach to education (Hadas & Battle, 2021). Furthermore, some refugee students feel that by adding more specific refugee services to college curriculums, this might "normalize" the experiences for others including non-refugee students who have experienced trauma, thus improving educational access for everyone (Odette, 2019).

Obtaining a college education can elevate refugees to leadership status in their communities, thus changing their vulnerability to empowerment. Access to higher education for one refugee can have positive ramifications throughout the community and for future generations as well (Hadas & Battle, 2021). In order to provide access to higher education, scholarships and community funding is necessary to support learners with refugee status (Streitwieser et al., 2019). Within academia, it is important to develop pedagogy which reflects refugee learning styles and experiences. This includes developing more global curriculum and teaching professors how to be more flexible with their deadlines and time management (Crea, 2016). Overall, cultural competency and therapeutic interaction is key to ensuring refugee student success on college campuses (Odette, 2017). And ultimately, it is in the best interests of local, national, and global governments to invest in the higher education needs of students with refugee status (Bajwa, 2017; Streitwieser et al., 2019; UNHCR, 2019).

Traditionally, philanthropic efforts for refugees are rarely focused on post-secondary education due to the need to provide basic necessities such as food and housing. Even when educationally focused, efforts are geared towards primary education as college level education is

viewed as “elite” (Crea, 2016). Thus, most targeted education support focuses on elementary and lower grades, and is not aimed at higher education (Avery, 2017; Streitwieser et al., 2019; Bauer & Gallagher, 2020). When diversity planning is conducted by college administrators, they usually include only immigrants and undocumented individuals in their strategic visions, without specifically elucidating the needs of refugee students (Tuliao, 2017). Therefore, concerted efforts must be in place to ensure that educational donors and community supports are geared specifically towards improving academic outcomes for students who have refugee status.

Recommendations for Leadership

There are several key takeaways for educational leaders to be mindful of in their practices and interactions. Students whose lives are lived in colonized experiences often have lives that are studied within classroom settings – this must be recognized in order to protect their humanity in the classroom and honor their lived experience as a resource (Razack, 2009; Naidoo, 2021). Because colonized education forces a unilateral analysis upon learners (Masta, 2019), it is crucial for educators to acknowledge the multiple ways of knowing and experiencing various phenomena (Razack, 2009, Dei, 2016; MacDonald, 2018). One method of change involves reframing rights as responsibilities, which alters the learner’s relationship to power and seeks to create more balance in sociopolitical exchanges (Absolon, 2019). Furthermore, curriculum planning must be representative of all perspectives which must be ensured by including diversity through students and staff as well as lesson plans. It is important to ensure that classroom lessons hold relevance to the surrounding community and society – not only locally, but globally (Dei, 2016; Zidani, 2021). By expanding concepts in the classroom to global contexts, students are able to see ways that various actions are intertwined - including those at the local level which contribute to forced displacement.

Teaching diverse students, especially students who have refugee status, requires expertise for increased engagement and learning outcomes (Varuzza et al., 2014; Naidoo, 2021). Responsive education helps teachers serve their diverse students with structured, effective methods to bridge cultural understandings with formal learning experiences, reduce cultural dissonance, do away with deficit orientations, minimize disengagement, remediate low proficiency, and address high dropout rates for students who are refugees (DeCapua, 2016; DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2004).

Utilizing a written literacy centric educational model that looks at students from the Global South as less than adequate is continuing to cause harm. Rather, trying to switch to a model that scaffolds prior knowledge and has an asset minded pedagogy will empower students. One such tool that leaders can empower educators to use is translanguaging, to "leverage, or use to maximum advantage, the language practices of their bilingual students and communities while addressing core content and language development standards" (Garcia et al. p. 2). Translanguaging validates and leverages students' linguistic knowledge.

In addition to validating students' prior knowledge, such as language, educational institutions and educators must support students on all levels of the hierarchy of needs and recognize trauma and mournings that are unique to refugee students. Training for teachers and creating spaces for these students to find peer relationships and trusted mentors and adults to establish community is essential for their success.

As technology is increasingly utilized to provide education to displaced populations, educators must also be aware that with the increase in online learning, concerns about colonizer discourse being transmitted through pedagogy are still present - despite claims that online learning creates equity in education (Spiegel et al., 2019). Some learners with refugee status may

be already well versed in an online learning environment. Online learning can be a feasible way to connect such learners from many locations, and to foster a sense of agency and self directed growth while learning. However, many refugees may face disparities with accessing adequate technology to engage in higher education learning (Hadas & Battle, 2021) and unequal access to technology may create further disparities amongst learners. Commitment to a decolonized approach can reduce disparities for students with refugee status.

Adopting a decolonized approach to education may mean altering grading policies and relaxing standardized processes in order to allow for more free exchange of thought and self-directed learning (Achille, 2016). Requiring regular participation and attendance – even in online settings - may serve to marginalize those who are already at a disadvantage, and therefore should be avoided (Spiegel et al., 2019). Finally, a decolonized stance prioritizes individuals over financial gain, and ability to pay should not be a barrier to acceptance (Dei, 2016), which also includes changing requirement of admissions criteria for higher education to prioritize learners who have been adversely impacted by colonial practices (Spiegel et al., 2017) – such as students with refugee status.

There is limited insight into the learning styles and efficacy of supports for students with refugee status in higher education (Streitwieser et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2021), so this needs to be a priority focus for those in academic leadership and research alike. Since less than 3% of refugees have access to higher education (Phan, 2018; Streitwiser et al., 2019; Bauer & Gallagher, 2020; Hadas & Battle, 2021), this educational disparity requires attention. Access to higher education improves the lives of refugee students on an individual, familial, and community wide level and therefore must be included in robust academic planning strategies for refugee students.

Discussion

Schools should continue to identify appropriate methods to improve instruction for learners with refugee status in classrooms. Higher education must respond to the needs of refugees as part of a comprehensive plan to integrate into their host society. Current research on the mechanics of responsive higher education systems is lacking though, and thus this becomes a salient topic from a social justice focus. Many university systems focus on language preparation for these learners, which is a basic support aligned with a colonized mindset. Including refugee policies in higher education plans is an ethical response to a global crisis, which seeks to improve the lives of refugees and their communities beyond basic subsidies (UNHCR, 2019; Jungblut et al., 2020). Educators should strive to recognize funds of knowledge that are not literacy based, and ensure that these are viewed with equal merit in comparison with literacy benchmarks. It is imperative that there is recognition of the myriad ways in which a literacy focus can marginalize refugee students (Lee, 2011) and directly relate to the mourning experience that learners with refugee status endure when migrating to a new country (González-Calvo, 2005) which can create increased dissonance and stress with adjusting to a new culture overall. Recognizing and attending to issues surrounding migratory mourning ensures that students who are refugees have the most appropriate psychosocial supports in the classroom setting. Therefore, it is necessary to include non-literacy based measures for evaluating growth and performance for students with refugee status.

More attention should be given to the transition from high school to higher education for learners who have refugee status. While education is recognized as a basic human right for those with refugee status by the 1951 Refugee Convention, this only guarantees access to primary education (Richardson et al., 2018) and therefore research into and understanding of these

dynamics is limited. Thus, educators, administrators, policy setters, and researchers should all focus on gaining more insight into the transition to higher education for learners with refugee status. In the absence of robust understanding, there is the risk of unintentionally marginalizing and therefore oppressing students with refugee status through educational practices.

While this paper is conceptualized within the ideal context of decolonizing education and the dismantling and re-creation of systemic structures, it is also necessary to recognize that the current educational environment embodies set values and structures and is often fraught with challenges, policies, and requirements which create resistance and slow the progress of change. Therefore, academic leaders are encouraged to make progress wherever they are able to do so. Educators and other academic leaders should continually strive to re-center pedagogical practices to be more inclusive of those on the margins, to prioritize the perspectives and experiences of indigenous students including learners with refugee status (Dei, 2016; Masta 2019), and to intentionally create spaces in which the dominant narratives are continuously challenged (Razack, 2009; Spiegel et al., 2017; Masta, 2019). In doing so, educational leaders are able to support change in the lives of learners who have refugee status and the spaces they inhabit by acknowledging them as future leaders with valuable knowledge to contribute to the educational system, one student at a time.

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