Chapter 8

Refugee Children and Parental Involvement in School Education: A Field Model

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ABSTRACT

While much has been achieved in this country to bring about equality for many groups, for refugees it has been a struggle. This chapter explores the state of refugee education in terms of definition and impact for children and families, including coordination constraints. It provides a program-model for working with refugee students and their families within a culturally responsive partnership at Washington Elementary School District, Arizona, USA. In addition, challenges are addressed leading to constant adapting, changing, and improving the program model over time based on the needs of the refugee students and their families.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What and how can school teachers, psychologists, nurses, social workers, and other professionals provide the best learning environment for school age refugee children?
- How can the refugee parents engage in working effectively within the schools to promote a school integration process for their children and an opportunity for successful educational outcomes?

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The proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” stems from the Igbo and Yoruba people of Africa, and still exists in numerous African languages and dialects. It is a statement so powerful that it could be implemented into any culture and society. It embodies the reality, that every single member of the family, school, and community has a significant role in the cycle of raising each and every child.

This African proverb provided the foundational vision in the process of developing the program-model described here for refugee students and their families. This program is global in scope. The data and case studies over the past fifteen years represent important underpinnings in which refugee education occurs for individuals coming from a camp, a city, and upon repatriation. The present chapter provides an example for how refugee children and families can engage in a cultural responsive partnership within their new setting. Both qualitative and quantitative data are discussed to capture the wide range of context-specific realities of refugee education, and how it provides in-depth understandings of particular contexts that allow for the testing of theories.

*Education promotes equality and lifts people out of poverty. It teaches children how to become good citizens. Education is not just for a privileged few, it is for everyone. It is a fundamental human right.*

-Ban Ki-moon

INTRODUCTION

A “Refugee” is defined in the Immigration and Nationality Act as:

...any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (UNHCR, 2017)

The provision of educational opportunities is one of the highest priorities for refugee communities. Refugee mothers, fathers, and children all over the world emphasize the importance of education. Access to education is a basic human right and has been linked to reducing poverty, holding promises of stability, and better lives for children, families, and communities. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognized compulsory primary education as a universal entitlement. The 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1979) called for no discrimination in educational provision for men and women, and the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirmed the right of all children, regardless of status, to free and compulsory primary education, to available and accessible secondary education, and to higher education on the basis of capacity (United Nations, 1989, Article 28). The right to education for refugees is articulated in Article 22 of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, resolution 64/290 (UNHCR, 2010) of the Human Rights Council of the United Nations General Assembly on the right to education in emergencies (UN & Education, 2010a), and in the draft resolution to the Human Rights Council on the right to education for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers (UN & Education, 2010b). The Arizona refugee program is following the guidelines from the United States refugee program which is a federally-funded
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