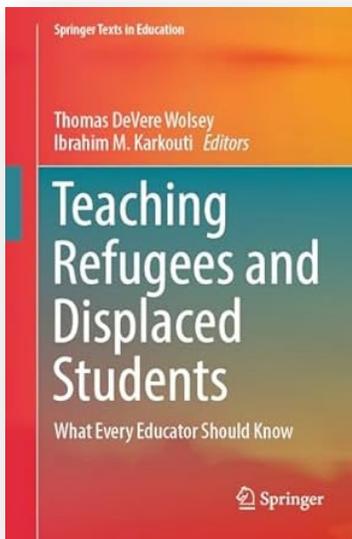


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Teaching Refugees and Displaced Students: What Every Educator Should Know

Thomas DeVere Wolsey and Ibrahim M. Kartouki (eds.)

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Review by Amanda Haste.

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The editors of this important volume have both worked – and continue to work – with refugees, from the wars in Southeast Asia in the 1970s (Wolsey) to research with teachers and students of the present Syrian war (Kartouki) and are both fully cognisant of the trauma suffered by their students. As they say in their preface,

Neither of [us] have been refugees. We have not been forced to flee for economic or security reasons. Not once did we ever have to wonder if by leaving home, we might never see our families or friends again. Even trying to imagine that scenario is difficult for us, but we have worked with refugees for many years who are

forced to do just those things. Together, we are trying to do what we can to fill life with some hope for those who are displaced and at the mercy of whatever agency will agree to help” (p. v).

From the point of view of refugee students themselves, “school is the safest, most normal place they know” and can be “a source of certainty or a source of more pain” (p. 249). As the editors point out, “nearly 50 million children are refugees, and almost half of them do not attend school. For those that do, new problems confront them when they walk through the schoolhouse doors” and they “need social-emotional support as much as they need academic support.

Schools should be venues where they feel strongly and genuinely supported, feel welcome, understood, and cared for" (p. 249).

The editors acknowledge that educators working with refugees are "right in the thick of offering hope" and it is this message of hope "for those who have every reason not to have hope" that pervades the book (p. v).

This book was conceptualised as a resource for educators, to help them "understand what they could do to nurture hope when the students they serve do not speak their language and no translator can be found" and to "know that they, too, are not alone" (p. v).

With contributions from scholars from the USA, England, Ireland, Spain, Germany, Norway, Kazakhstan, Turkey, South Africa, and Egypt, this comprehensive volume is divided into five sections.

Part I Restoring Hope in School focuses on the role of education in refugees' lives. In "Where Hope Flourishes: Teaching Refugee Children in Troubling Times" Leila Kajee discusses tackling the concerns of the resident population to an influx of refugees, and offers advice for teachers managing the inevitable cultural and linguistic diversity of their classrooms. Subsequent chapters include Safiye Namver and Yetkin Yildirim's "Restoring Hope in Resettlement" which examines the positive role of community-led extracurricular and experiential opportunities; Julie Sochacki and Karen I. Case's "Compassionate Pedagogy" that "seeks to develop universal classroom principles [...] via the merging of a narrative curriculum with mindfulness and a pedagogical form derived from compassion focused therapy (CFT)" (p. 11); and Kartouki's "Leveraging Multiculturalism and Social Support" that discusses helping Syrian refugees in Lebanon through teachers' diversity awareness and improved teacher training.

Part II Restoring Hope Through Access and Acceptance in Higher Education contains four highly focused essays, beginning with Dilma De Araujo's "How Teachers Can Improve the Experiences of Refugee Students with SEND¹ with Higher Education Goals". This chapter "addresses inclusive education and responds to diversity and equality issues to enhance higher education experiences of refugee students with disabilities" (p. 97).

¹ Special Education Needs and Disabilities

A different perspective is offered regarding "Higher Education in Refugee Camps" in which Paul O'Keeffe presents a study of the University of Geneva's higher education in refugee contexts collaborative learning ecosystem (CLE), which he developed and led for higher education programs in Jordan's Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya and Azraq refugee camp 2017 to 2020 (p. 109).

"Cultivating Campus Belonging for Refugee College Students" by Mohamed Elhess, Julia Mahfouz, and Laura Summers tackles the challenges facing refugee students in locating themselves culturally and socially in their host country, while "bearing the nightmares of past experiences and facing the adversities of the sociopolitical climate of the host country" such as the shortening of the asylum application deadline in France, and the Muslim travel ban (p. 127).

In the final chapter in this section, Daria Mizza discusses "The Pathway to Unlocking Refugees' Learning Potential" at all levels of education. Her thesis is that national education systems rarely meet the needs of refugee students, "whose forced displacement makes them particularly vulnerable to a national education system hindering their integration potential" and that "learning opportunities are contingent upon the national education system detecting and accommodating refugee student's preexisting skills and knowledge from the beginning" (p. 139).

Part III Restoring Hope in the Community begins with a British perspective to "Promoting the Well-Being of Asylum-Seeking and Refugee Children Within and Beyond the School Gates" in which Mehmet Karakus, Anas Hajar and Hasan Aydin conclude that schools need "to develop socioemotionally, culturally, or/and religiously sensitive responses for a more inclusive school environment" (p. 167), while in "Multicultural School Events: Possibilities and Pitfalls for Refugee Students and Their Families" Thor-André Skrefsrud discusses the pros and cons of such events in mobilizing group-group-based identities and presents counter-narratives regarding diasporic identity, belonging, and learning (p. 197).

In Part IV Restoring Hope Through Effective Leadership, Omer Caliskan and Hilal Buyukgoze look at "Social Justice Leadership and Ecology of Education" in a Turkish context, while Bünyamin Han and Rasim Tösten

examine “Leadership for Refugee Education,” concluding that “policies on refugee education made by governments alone are not sufficient” but that “all sectors related to education [...] are expected to contribute to this process (p. 244). The section is rounded off by Wolsey and Kartouki’s “School Leadership Makes Hope Possible” in which the authors offer a set of practical solutions that can be immediately implemented by school leaders.

Part V Restoring Hope Across Generations contains a single essay: Wolsey’s “Fostering Hope Through Generations—Overcoming Trauma,” that emphasizes the resilience of families who, “rather than view [their] trauma as a source of anger and despair [have] found strength through adversity” (p. 270).

Within the covers of this book lie harrowing accounts of the lived experiences of refugee students that will make anyone who has never been displaced from their home and family count their blessings. The teachers working with refugees or with transgenerational trauma often have little or no training, but from the pages of this page we see that, time and again, dedicated educators draw on their own skills and experience to rise to the challenge of making school and college safe places where refugee students can thrive and realize their potential. As Wolsey says, in engaging with their students and learning about their stories and their cultural background, educators can teach with empathy and optimism, and by doing so can teach their students “the nuances of resilience, iteration by iteration” (p. 270).

In short, this volume not only provides in-depth scholarly studies in the field of refugee education, but achieves the editors’ aim of a comprehensive, sensitive and practical guide for all educators working with refugee students and their families. This reviewer recommends this volume wholeheartedly, and its message of hope, optimism and resilience is one we should all take to heart.

Amanda J. Haste (*Ph.D. Musicology; Dip. Trans.*) is an Anglo-French musicologist, linguist and academic translator, and was adjunct faculty at Aix-Marseille University, France until 2022. Her research interests include identity construction through music and language, and the expatriate experience. As a translator she regularly works with a non-profit in Paris translating texts for refugees and asylum seekers in France.