

Chapter 15

Refugee Education: Insights From Intercultural Education

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ABSTRACT

In this contribution, the potential of intercultural approaches to education and in particular the role of heritage language teachers is explored. Using data from a study dealing with the consideration of cultural diversity in educational contexts, the actions of these teachers will be analyzed and put into perspective with the needs of refugee students and their parents identified in the international literature. The results obtained after analysis of the semi-directive interviews are put into a theoretical perspective using the acculturation strategies model developed by Berry and the linguistic interdependence theory. This exploratory study shows the pedagogical potential of HL teachers regarding refugee and migrant pupils' integration; it also shows how intercultural approaches can be a relevant and powerful resource in this field. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations and thus needs to be considered as exploratory; further research needs to be conducted in this field.

INTRODUCTION

Every child should be able to make his or her right to education a reality, yet for a number of children multiple barriers prevent them from doing so. Conflicts, migrations, crises ... many problems can hinder the students' school career, their access to knowledge and finally their achievement of autonomy. For this reason, numerous studies have been conducted on the schooling of refugee students, whether in countries of first reception or in countries of resettlement. The problems differ but the objective remains the same: to guarantee all children access to knowledge.

In recent years, in our research context (Geneva, Switzerland), populations of students with a migratory background have changed and many refugee students have been integrated into elementary school (Evrard, Hrizi, Ducrey, & Rastoldo, 2016). In order to meet their needs, different actors (Sanchez-Mazas, Changkakoti, & Mottet, 2018) have been mobilized and different innovative projects have been launched

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7283-2.ch015

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(Sanchez-Mazas & Changkakoti, 2016). These projects are aimed at the success of students, their integration and the valorization of their cultural identity.

As part of this contribution, the author wishes to explore the potential of intercultural approaches to address the specific needs of refugee students.

In order to analyze these links between intercultural approaches to education and the schooling of refugee students, this contribution will bring together two orientations. The first is empirical. In fact, during research on cultural diversity within a school, we found that heritage-language (HL) teachers (using the students' mother-tongue) could register as cultural mediators and thus participate in the (school) integration of refugee parents and children. Through semi-structured interviews with these teachers, the author will attempt to identify how these roles created within the framework of intercultural education (Akkari & Radhouane, 2019) can benefit refugee students. The interviews will be analyzed following the logic of content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2003).

The second orientation is theoretical. Echoing the interviews conducted, the author will examine the relevance of Berry's model of acculturation strategies (as cited in Amin, 2012) to analyze and support projects aimed at the schooling of refugee students. It seems that this theoretical model can contribute to an understanding of the actors' attitudes, but also it can contribute to the body of knowledge on the specific issues at stake in the schooling of refugee students. The author will also mobilize the linguistic interdependence theory (Cummins, 2015) which allows her to analyze the importance of the mother tongue. For this research, the usual process of developing a theoretical framework before collecting the data was reversed because the main theme of this paper emerged from the data and drove the author to explore frameworks in order to understand the potential of the actors interviewed. Nevertheless, to facilitate the flow of this chapter, the theories that are mobilized are presented before the data analysis.

The author will base her analysis on the international literature concerning the educational integration of refugee students. Moreover, different projects such as the development of Educational Cultural Brokers (Yohani, 2011) or tutoring in mother tongue (Avery, 2017) will allow her to put the experiences analyzed in the research context into perspective. The intersection between empirical and theoretical approaches and the findings of the international literature will permit reflection on the complexity of welcoming refugee students in schools. The final objective is to support teaching practices, as well as the actions of extra-curricular actors and, through them, refugee students and their parents.

BACKGROUND

While many refugees are fleeing their own country to seek protection and better life conditions, many others are already trying to resettle in another country. Neither of these two steps is an easy process and both demand much resilience and strength. Among these people, many children are discovering a new environment, a new culture and, last but not least, a new school. On the other hand, teachers in resettlement countries find themselves confronted with a new profile of students. Their teaching skills are challenged by the diversity of refugee children's school experiences, literacy skills and so on.

For these reasons, many studies are conducted in order to understand the complexity of the resettlement process and of refugee education.

At the end of a broad reading of the international literature about refugee education, different themes have emerged, such as: (1) the influences of pre- and post-migration backgrounds; (2) refugee children's school integration; (3) school actors' role in refugee education; and (4) the parents of refugee students.

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