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### Teacher Education and Refugee Students

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# Teacher Education and Refugee Students **FREE**

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<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.285>

**Published online:** 23 May 2019

## Summary

Refugee children and youth encounter challenges in the process of resettlement and as they transition to schools. Their needs and specific situations have to be considered both structurally and at individual levels, and their narratives of transition should not be oversimplified, with resettlement as the end point of challenges. Backgrounding these considerations, teachers can be prepared to understand the vast scope of refugee students' adaptive experience and its impact on educational practice. Teacher education that is attuned to these needs can be informed by several anchoring principles: recognizing the complex educational and sociocultural challenges refugee students face in schools; actively engaging with both conceptualizing and enacting effective practices within and against public school structures; and participating in ongoing reflection and reconceptualization of the tensions that arise in academic and identity work with refugee youth.

**Keywords:** refugee students, teacher education, public schools, identity

**Subjects:** Curriculum and Pedagogy, Education, Cultures, and Ethnicities, Education and Society

## Refugee Youth in Global Context

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A record number of over 65 million people around the world have been forcibly displaced—both internally and externally—with an estimated third being refugees, or persons with a well-founded fear of returning to their home countries because of violence or persecution. At least 15 million, or 52% of refugees, are school-age youth under the age of 18. During the first decade of the 21st century, the number of school-age refugees worldwide was relatively stable, but it has grown, on average, by 600,000 children and adolescents annually since 2011 (UNHCR, 2016). These staggering statistics are particularly sobering when considering that a refugee child could spend his or her entire childhood and youth in protracted refugee situations where refugees can neither return to their home countries nor be resettled to third states, and thus live in “permanent temporariness” (Bailey, Wright, Mountz, & Miyares, 2002). In this indefinite condition, basic rights such as healthcare, freedom of movement, and education remain precarious. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) has therefore emphasized that thinking beyond a refugee's basic survival is of the utmost importance in a socioeconomic context where the education of people in exile tends to be the first item cut when having to meet basic needs such as sustenance, shelter, and medical assistance. As a result, instead of viewing education as an essential element in

humanitarian responses to crises (Sinclair, 2001), only half of refugee children have access to elementary education and a quarter to secondary studies, and higher education remains a distant dream for the overwhelming majority.

A contextual emphasis on these numbers offers insight into the unprecedented scope of the global situation and the daunting undertaking to ensure quality education to all refugee children and youth. Indeed, the UNHCR estimated that because of the growth rate among school-age refugees in the second decade of the 21st century, an average of 12,000 additional classrooms and 20,000 additional teachers would be needed each year. The scope of teaching refugee children and youth goes far beyond the parameters of formal schooling and certainly beyond schooling in Western resettlement countries, which tend to be the prevalent locales for undertaking scholarly examinations of teacher education and training. Although the focus of this article is on the implications of refugee resettlement experiences for the ways in which we prepare teachers in formal teacher education and certification programs in high-income nations, we do so with the recognition that dedicated individuals and organizations work tirelessly to offer various forms of education and prepare teachers and volunteers to work with refugee youth at multiple stages of their displacement experience outside of contexts where sustained, formal teacher education can take place. In fact, although European countries' intake of refugees has received much Western media attention in recent years, "the vast majority of the world's refugees—86 per cent—are hosted in developing regions, with more than a quarter in the world's least developed countries" (UNHCR, 2016). In fact, 56% of the world's 21 million refugees are being hosted by just 10 countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. Only a comparatively small number of the world's refugees are ultimately resettled in economically advanced nations, moving to states that have agreed to admit them with the intent of granting them permanent residency, legal protection, and access to rights that mirror those of citizens. The United States admitted approximately 70,000 refugees in the 2016 fiscal year, and that number ranges from 60,000 to 80,000 annually. Although the numbers are comparatively small when placed in the global context, these resettled refugees' experiences and needs remain of utmost importance to how social institutions such as schools and university teacher education programs adapt to respond and contribute to the youth's fruitful integration into their new society. For the history of these global trends, this article draws mainly on literature originating in or focusing on the United States, with the understanding that its implications for practice are valuable in other contexts as well. The article begins with an overview of refugee children and youth's needs in the process of resettlement as they transition to schools and their structures. We do so in order to ground our subsequent focus on the ways in which teacher educators have responded and continue to examine ways to prepare teachers who will work with refugee-status youth. In "The Needs of Refugee Youth: A Contextual Overview," we anchor the brief overview of the needs of refugee youth with three grounding principles for teacher educators aiming to understand the vast scope of refugee students' adaptive experience. In "Teacher Education Responses to Refugee Students," we similarly offer three mirroring tasks that can inform the work of teacher educators as they continue to guide teachers who work in increasingly diverse contexts that specifically include refugee students.

## The Needs of Refugee Youth: A Contextual Overview

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The turn of the 21st century has witnessed a rise in studies concerning the needs of resettled refugee youth in particular, as newcomers whose needs may overlap with those of immigrants but whose specific challenges must be intently and separately addressed (Matthews, 2008). Although many studies over the last three decades have continued the predominant focus on medical and mental health issues, there has also been an increased interest in refugee youth's interaction with schools in the context of reception, especially because positive educational experiences provide such youth with a semblance of normalcy and offer hope in tumultuous times of transition (Sinclair, 2001). Thorough scholarly reviews of studies conducted in multiple Western resettlement countries have delineated the major findings of such studies, both in terms of mental health focus and educational needs (e.g., Fazel, Reed, Panter-Brick, & Stein, 2012; Lustig et al., 2004; McBrien, 2005), including teacher-oriented concise reviews (e.g., Strekalova & Hoot, 2008). Their careful work will not be replicated here, but such reviews serve to inform teacher educators' approaches to pre-service and in-service education. The cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of work with refugee youth and the importance of addressing their needs contextually are partly reflected in the overlaps that exist between reviews that focus on mental health and those aimed at assessing educational needs. For example, psychosocial adjustment and language acquisition are shown to be affected by experiences of trauma (McBrien, 2005); schools' capabilities to meet students' emotional and psychosocial needs are repeatedly emphasized along with interest in developing school-based refugee mental health services to reduce stigma and increase treatment access (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007); service providers such as schools are reminded by psychologists that good overall functioning in refugee youth can coexist with mental health symptoms and may mask them (Fazel et al., 2012), just as high academic achievement was found to mask mental health challenges like anxiety and depression in newcomer youth in general (Qin, 2008).

An in-depth overview of the complex, multidisciplinary literature on refugee needs lies beyond the scope of this article. Instead, it draws attention to three interconnected, and at times overlapping, anchoring principles as an organizing matrix for teachers and teacher educators considering the vast scope of challenges among refugee youth: (a) remaining vigilant against oversimplification; (b) maintaining a healthy skepticism in the face of narratives that mainly focus on resettlement as a form of celebratory triumph; and (c) examining refugee youth's needs not only from an individual perspective of personal characteristics and individual challenges but also structurally. These organizing principles are meant to problematize and counter popular narratives that tend to inform quotidian conversations around refugee experiences and resettlement policies. Such discourses might thus easily inform teacher candidates simply through exposure to pervasive conversations and media representations that are now an integral part of life in Western resettlement countries. Although these are not discursive patterns that migration scholars would initiate, endorse, or espouse, it is essential that the work of advocacy and inclusion for refugee youth in the field of teacher education

would consider and counter popular misconceptions that might undermine powerful, justice-oriented work. It is in this context that the article suggests these three principles as anchor points in the work of teacher education for refugee youth.

First, a complex understanding of refugee youth experiences equips against oversimplification of refugees' identity as dehistoricized and dehumanized victims (Malkki, 1996; Rutter, 2006). Instead, it acknowledges that there are intersectional elements that require attention to individual experiences and transitions, while also foregrounding dimensions that are shared across refugees' lives (Colson, 2003). Jill Rutter's (2006) examination of refugee youth's experiences and refugee-oriented policies in the United Kingdom, for example, highlighted that more than three-quarters of the studies she examined were disciplinarily psychological and focused on trauma. Indeed, close attention to the trauma many of these youth have experienced is essential to responding well to their needs, as major reviews of the psychological literature with refugee youth have revealed that exposure to violence was a central risk factor in their adaptation (Lustig et al., 2004; Fazel et al., 2012). At the same time, there has been much debate over which factors are most predictive of adverse outcomes. Although exposure to military conflict has received much attention, daily forms of ongoing suffering occur during or after militarized violence in the chronology of displacement that are caused by social, economic, and political factors that lead to a perpetual sense of uncertainty about the future, stressful family environments, physical ailments and malnutrition, and loss of social networks (Panter-Brick, Eggerman, Gonzalez, & Safdar, 2009). Moreover, although post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a destabilizing factor for some displaced youth and they need appropriate support (Ajdukovic, 1998; Ghazali, 2004), Jill Rutter (2006) and Julie Matthews (2008) have argued that positioning refugee youth primarily as traumatized individuals, through medical and psychological lenses, may also be employed in resettlement countries to overemphasize the personal at the expense of the structural and the pre-settlement experience at the expense of those taking place post-settlement. Both tendencies can become problematic in that they can shift focus away from major obstacles faced by refugees in the receiving states, and they reduce complex issues of adaptation to an individualized problem that is literally embodied in the refugee; has taken place elsewhere; and is thus beyond the reach or responsibility of the receiving context.

Second, a thorough understanding of refugee resettlement guards against positioning refugees' arrival in the new, peaceful countries as a narrowly defined, albeit joyful, "end point" in a long and traumatic resettlement experience. The dramatic media images of refugees escaping destruction and violence form a powerful background for the receiving communities' perception of the experience, and resettlement is often understandably cloaked in a victorious veneer. Nevertheless, focusing mainly on the rightful celebration of the escape from "elsewhere" tends to obscure the difficulties that begin "here," only after arrival, as refugees face the new society's institutions and demands. After resettlement, refugee youth and families may, in fact, experience what literary and environmental scholar Rob Nixon (2011) calls "slow violence"—"a violence occur[ing] gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction . . . dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (p. 2). Whereas environmental work employing the

framework of slow violence refers to the importance and the difficulty of representing in political agendas gradual, eroding challenges such as climate change or biodiversity shifts, the framework is informative in thinking of the experiences of refugees' post-resettlement. Such a framework cautions against the tendency to focus on "arresting stories, images and symbols" (p. 3) of refugees' trauma and resettlement at the expense of "the pervasive but elusive violence of delayed effects" (p. 3). "Slow violence" and the forms it may take for refugees is equally important in the effects it has on children and youth, yet it is often invisible when the focus of receiving communities tends to be on the tragic, at times sensationalized, violence that has been escaped rather than on the daily aftermath (Bonet, 2016). McWilliams and Bonet (2015) suggest that refugee students and their families are forced out of the countries in which they are living to resettlement public schools that often press them to subscribe to a "cruel optimism" about their lives while they continuously live on "continuums of precarity" rather than in positively resolved situations.

Ongoing struggles after resettlement cover a wide spectrum. Precarious psychosocial adaptation is brought on by the very process of displacement and relocation, and some studies show these youth do not seem to improve over time in the same way as youth who have been exposed to similar traumas but have not been displaced (Fazel et al., 2012). The effects of losing family members and navigating new family structures takes a toll, as the extended family members of many youths, such as cousins or aunts, may be resettled in different countries or continue to remain indefinitely in refugee camps. A particularly trying type of separation is experienced by unaccompanied minors whose circumstances are particularly demanding and who are considered to be particularly vulnerable both in the process of transition and after gaining refugee status (Groark, Sclare, & Raval, 2011; Huemer et al., 2009). There are then daunting tasks of adaption to linguistic, cultural, and social difference even when acculturation does take place more quickly for youth compared to their parents. Governmental assistance is only initial and minimal, so financial hardship is common, as is underemployment, even for family members who are highly educated (Krahn et al., 2000). These differential outcomes for refugees, especially those of color, have been associated with the "political economy of labor migration" that manifests interpersonal and structural racism and combats neoclassical claims that the job market is "blind to ethnicity" (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007, p. 59). School-specific challenges can abound as well among youth. Despite the fact that relationships and a sense of peer support are shown to be central to adaptation and academic success, and protective against anxiety and depression (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007; Kovacev, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009), the social isolation of refugee youth in schools can be caused by language barriers, a sense of lacking competence in the inner workings of the new school system (Anderson, 2004; Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002), and deficit frameworks employed by the institution to understand these youth (Rana et al., 2011; Roy & Roxas, 2011), as well as by suboptimal welcoming structures or leadership involvement in some schools (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). Experiences in these educational contexts tend to be gendered (Young & Chan, 2014), with girls exhibiting more internalizing behaviors than boys, which often leads to harsher repercussions for boys whose externalization of stress can be perceived as behavior problems (Fazel et al., 2012). There are also educational consequences to the gaps in schooling experienced by some youth—more

girls than boys—during the relocation process; and there is a subsequent lack of exposure to particular learning skills (Anderson, 2004) as well as content-specific issues because disciplines require particular background training and disciplinary-specific writing in academic English that goes beyond the conversational skill more easily acquired (Carrasquillo & Rodriguez, 2002; Verplaetse & Migliacci, 2008). As result, many refugee youth have higher rates of school dropout—in fact, the dropout rate for immigrant and refugee students has not been affected by the progress made in student retention over the last few decades and has remained twice as high as that of students born in the United States (Child Trends Databank, 2015).

As this vast array of factors coalesce into important structural barriers to accessing the new society's institutions, including schools, the situation points to the third anchoring principle for considering the needs of refugee youth: future teachers need to be attuned to both individual and structural challenges, and prepared to recognize the structural dynamics that frame their work with students, both in and out of classrooms. Individual-level factors in schools, such as ability to complete homework and overall engagement (Bang, 2012), remain important to refugee students' success, as are family-level factors such as parents' ability to support their students academically in the middle of their own economic and acculturation struggles (Georgis, Gokiart, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Kanu, 2008). At the same time, the structural dynamics in the context of reception matter tremendously for integration and adaptation—scholarly research with this issue has taken multiple disciplinary perspectives, drawing from sociology, psychology, and education. As a sociological concept, “context of reception” (Portes & Rumbaut, 2006) was introduced by migration scholars to underline the economic, policy, and social elements that interact to impact newcomer groups—both immigrants and refugees—differently in their long-term adaptation and integration. Variations in the opportunity structure involving settlement location, types of work and education accessibility, and forms of social capital available to newcomer groups, as well as types of welcoming mechanisms, are all important in adaptation and lead to vastly different outcomes.

For example, refugees arriving currently in the United States and Europe are predominantly people of color, or many are Muslim. In fact, in 2016, the United States admitted the highest number of Muslim refugees of any year since data on self-reported religious affiliations became publicly available in 2002 (Pew Center, 2016). As the general public remains reluctant, if not openly hostile, to the presence of refugees and particular ethno-religious facets such as being Muslim, transition difficulties of current refugees are augmented when Muslim identities are often equated with undesirable and dangerous characteristics (Abu El-Haj, 2015) or when the resettlement locales express misguided fascination with such aspects as the purported inferior role of girls and women in Islam (Buck & Silver, 2012). In addition, marginalization that emerges from the compounded effects of race, religion, and class has been well documented in longitudinal studies (e.g., Abdi, 2015), as over-policing of refugee communities challenges well-being and adaptation. At the same time, despite challenges such as othering and discrimination, refugee youth also find creative ways to respond and thus problematize the perception of Muslim refugee students as passive victims of forces that structure their lives (Oikonomidou, 2007). Subsequent sociological work on the importance of

the receiving context, specifically focused on refugees (e.g., McWilliams & Bonet, 2015), has fine-tuned elements of the context of reception, examining the dynamics of receiving communities through neighborhood effects, from the structure of agencies involved in resettlement to the socioeconomic condition and ideological orientations present in particular locales and host communities.

Additional disciplinary and theoretical perspectives such as community psychology have also expanded beyond the individual levels of analysis, to advocate for what ecological frameworks and community-level focus can contribute to understanding refugee adaptation (Birman, Trickett, & Vinokurov, 2002; Scott Smith, 2008; Trickett et al., 2000). Adaptation and acculturation ultimately occur in context and in two-way relationships between newcomers and host communities (Reed et al., 2012), with refugees' perception of how they are received in the community being highly relevant to adaptation (Sujoldzic, Peternel, Kulenovic, & Terzic, 2006). In fact, refugees' perception of discrimination was in some studies the best predictor of depression and PTSD (e.g., Ellis, MacDonald, Lincoln, & Cabral, 2008).

Scholarly work in education also referred to such ecological models to show the connection between the person and the surrounding embedded layers of influence (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017) and to further highlight ways in which schools function as central sites of reception for newcomer refugee youth, or as "complex mediation systems" (de Wal Pastoor, 2015) that can mitigate the vicissitudes of resettlement or exacerbate them. These elements include the negative consequences of high-poverty schools in areas where many refugees are resettled; their isolation in tracked programs that often lead to school experiences secluded from US-born students (Kiang & Supple, 2016); the availability of well-qualified and certified teachers and access to high-quality curriculum (Golden et al., 2014); the ways school leadership is involved and schools are structured (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008), curricular contexts with the potential to include or exclude (Goodwin, 2010a; He, Phillion, Chan, & Xu, 2008); the potential for multicultural and culturally responsive education to generate in schools positive "counter-contexts" (Fruja Anthor & Roxas, 2016); the role of counselors (Goh et al., 2007); and the role of teachers as "agents of reception" for newcomers to these sites (Dabach, 2011). Preparing teachers, then, becomes central in structural attempts to respond positively to the presence of refugee youth in new contexts of reception.

It is these attempts that the article turns to next, with the important caveat that just as caution is necessary against obscuring the structural elements of refugee youth adaptation, so too teacher educators may need to guard against inadvertently positioning teachers as solely responsible for the positive reception, adaptation, and success of refugee students. Indeed, teacher education programs work tirelessly to invest in future teachers as change agents who are "transformative intellectuals" (Giroux, 1988) and work toward social justice. They do so, however, with an understanding of the embedded nature of teachers' work, as they navigate and balance vastly diverse work environments and resources, diverse ideological contexts, and uneven access to support structures.



## Teacher Education Responses to Refugee Students

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In response to protracted refugee situations around the world, social sciences began responding in a more sustained scholarly manner to questions pertaining to refugee development in the late 1970s, including the emergence of refugee studies as an independent field of scholarly research. Although research efforts in refugee studies have grown, in particular over the last three decades, there is also important work that dates back to studies on the displacement caused by the two World Wars, therefore prior to the emergence of the field itself or the establishment of associated centers and institutions (Black, 2001). In the education literature, the adaptation of refugee students and its implication for theory and practice emerged only later, starting at first with the role of migration in the adaptation of immigrant students in schools and then beginning to nuance the literature with the specific needs of refugee students. In the United States, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, education scholars had already been rigorously engaged with questions of equitable education and responding to the needs of youth across racial and social divides as the field of multicultural education continued to conceptualize and work toward the implementation of an equitable and just education for children. This work initially originated in questions about equity and access to quality education for historical minority youth, but its justice-oriented frameworks would later inform important questions about the needs of other diverse populations such as immigrant students and English language learners. In the last decade of the 20th century, concern that these latter groups had not been served well through the educational reforms started in the 1980s prompted a rising interest in the trajectories of success among immigrant youth. Josue Gonzalez and Linda Darling-Hammond's *New Concepts for New Challenges: Professional Development for Teachers of Immigrant Youth* (1997) reminds us of the era's emergent consideration of the questions concerning the newcomer youth, especially as it was part of a book series, *Topics in Immigrant Education* (Peyton & Christian, 1997), that aimed to provide critical reviews of research to date as well as descriptions of promising programs to promote the success of newcomer youth. Only later would the needs of refugee students be distinctly differentiated from the overall literature on immigrants and their educational needs, and this differentiation is an ongoing requirement (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). This important caveat is reflected in the predominance of immigrant-focused literature, rather than the more specific attention to refugee youth, with the understanding that the former has been and remains important in highlighting the types of challenges that emerge from cross-border migration in general. For example, the rationale for Gonzales and Darling-Hammond's 1997 volume captures the ongoing bind of many schools two decades later:

It is increasingly clear that all teachers with immigrant students and English language learners in their classes need to know about second language development, cross-cultural issues, and methods to teach both language and academic content. However, most classroom teachers, counselors, and administrators receive no special training in these areas. (p. 14)

Their volume thus highlights the need to cultivate culturally aware, reflective teachers who understand that the institution of schooling must respond to shifts in demographics and student needs. They thus stress the importance of a lifelong learning approach to teacher training that spans the pre-service and in-service stages and includes development strategies that increase collaboration among teachers. In the two decades since this evaluation, there has been an exponential growth in writing about immigrants and refugees in schools; the preparation of teachers and teaching contexts that work well (Goodwin, 2002, 2010b; Mendenhall, Bartlett, & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2017; Moinolnolki & Han, 2017; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002); and the production of documents that offer future teachers a practical awareness of the types of challenges faced by immigrants, and refugees in particular (e.g., Moinolnolki & Han, 2017; Strekalova & Hoot, 2008; Szente, Hoot, & Taylor, 2006). The predominance of writing remains on immigrant youth rather than refugees, specifically, and thus poses a continued concern with the appearance of conflating the two types of migration and what their challenges may entail for students. It is therefore this distinction that teacher educators need to continue addressing and nuancing while also delving into continued issues we have learned from studies with immigrant youth, because these remain difficult to address and redress in the practice of many schools.

Complexities arise from the fact that teacher education needs to cultivate not only factual awareness about diverse populations and refugee youth, nor only pedagogical and content knowledge, but also teachers' reflection and self-reflection about the task of teaching that responds to these learners' needs. The vast literature on teacher education has explored the means by which such goals could be accomplished with teachers, and this article echoes major arguments in the field of teacher education (Cochran-Smith, 2006; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007). Ultimately, "learning to teach is complex and requires the acquisition of specialized knowledge and professional methods through formal study and apprenticeship" (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013, p. 335). But also learning to teach goes well beyond technical considerations and is, rather, "a decision-making process that demands the constant reinvention of practice so as to responsively meet needs presented by ever-changing contexts and diverse learners" (p. 335). Scholarly work on how this is to be accomplished also included the much-debated idea of whether successful teachers need to embody particular "dispositions" (Freeman, 2007). In the United States, for example, the 2000 adoption of new standards by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) represented a turning point for the subsequent debates over whether it is necessary to identify such professional dispositions as an explicit obligation. Against the background of claims that there are no means to measure how such dispositions impact effectiveness, others argued that a "teachers' attitudes, values, and beliefs about students, about teaching, and about themselves, strongly influence the impact they will have on student learning and development" (Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000, p. 2). Regardless of the position in the debate, its very existence suggests a genuine and important interest among teacher educators to understand and pursue the equipping of teachers on moral and ethical foundations, with all the disagreement over how these facets would need to manifest in teacher education

programs. Moreover, the debate is, essentially, “about what we value in the teaching profession” so we can “prepare teachers who will be committed to all learners’ learning and growth” (Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb, 2007, p. 362).

Questions about the value foundations of teacher education—questions that both teachers and students in teacher education programs need to become involved with in a rigorous manner, both programmatically and personally—cannot be divorced from questions about the knowledge foundations of teacher preparation for refugee youth. Lin Goodwin’s (2010b) framework of “knowledge domains” can serve to ground not only the work of future teachers but also the work of those who teach them (Goodwin & Kosnik, 2013). Even if not specifically focused on the needs of refugee youth, the knowledge domains framework also encompasses central questions about the roles of values and self-examination applicable to working with youth facing complex challenges.

Indeed, the very first knowledge domain in the framework is “personal knowledge,” referring to the need for self-reflection and critically unearthing one’s beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions. Because work with refugee youth takes place on the background of major discourses about refugees’ identities, histories, worth, and rights, and because these discourses intersect with educators’ own narratives, teachers need repeated and genuine contexts where they can examine this “personal knowledge” in-depth. “Contextual knowledge,” the second domain, helps position teachers beyond the role of technicians who enact curricula or distributors of knowledge through rehearsed techniques. Rather, through learning the importance of understanding learners and schools in society, teachers are equipped beyond their program, with ways of continuing to study teaching and children. Such teachers would then be prepared for the shifting demographics in their classrooms, being ready to ask penetrating questions about refugee youth’s position and needs in the context of their new school and communities. With this preparation, teachers would then be drawing on the third knowledge domain—“pedagogical knowledge” of curriculum development, learning theories and teaching methods and “curriculum maker[s]—one[s] who design a curriculum that grows out of the needs and interests of the students (Goodwin, 2010b, p. 25). One of the great challenges of current classroom contexts for refugee youth is the ability to adapt to curricula that are not only taught in a language most are still trying to master to academic levels, but that also reflect prior content and cultural knowledge many youth do not possess. Teachers’ learned ability to create genuine learning opportunities for these youth is thus of central importance, and it requires the agency of teachers to generate, not only implement, curricula that are relevant, intellectually stimulating, and engaging.

All three knowledge domains—personal, contextual, and pedagogical—interact on the background of the last, equally important two: sociological and social knowledge. The sociological dimensions of promoting diversity and social justice are central because, as Goodwin & Kosnik (2013) put it, “Undoubtedly, we need teachers who are diverse not just in how they look, where they come from, the language they speak, and the histories they embody, but in how they think, interact with *Other(s)*” (p. 341). Social knowledge is necessitated by the importance of navigating complex dynamics daily, not only with students themselves but also with other school staff and the community. Being able to model and

participate in democratic processes helps teachers be advocates for their refugee students. It also helps them learn these facets in their classrooms that enact collaboration, healthy debate, and justice so that these students, too, can learn of their own agency to advocate for themselves and others in the world.

Recognizing that “it would be presumptuous for teacher educators to believe that we can identify a priori all that our student teachers will need to know in order to be successful with the wide variety of human beings with whom they will work and in the varied settings in which they will do this work” (Goodwin, 2010b, p. 24), this article suggests several tasks to be continued by teacher education in pursuing justice-oriented work with refugee students. These tasks mirror the three guiding principles highlighted in the contextual needs of refugee youth, as well as reflect the five “knowledge domains,” inviting educators to consider these conceptual juxtapositions that inform the core of practice with refugee youth.

### **Task 1: Recognition of the Complex Educational and Sociocultural Challenges Refugee Students Face in Their Transition to Public Schools**

As the overview has pointed out, refugee students face a complex set of educational and sociocultural challenges when they enroll in public schools, and a genuine engagement with understanding these dynamics is essential on the part of teacher educators. Refugee students have often experienced mental and physical trauma and violence because of political unrest and upheaval in their country of origin, as well as their forced departure from their original homes. These forms of trauma are typically exacerbated by protracted periods of displacement in refugee camps, and PTSD that is often not treated (Betancourt et al., 2015; Sinclair, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, 2000; Volkan, 1993; Westernmeyer & Wahmanholm, 1996). In addition to psychosocial trauma, many students face academic challenges because of consequent disruption to access to formal schooling environments in their country of origin, in refugee camps where they have been displaced, or on their arrival to their country of resettlement. Even for youth who had access to high-quality education prior to displacement, periods of interrupted access to formal school result in large gaps in students’ academic content knowledge as well as increased difficulty with learning the English language (Cummins, 1995; Guerrero, 2004; Olsen, 2000; Valdes, 1998). Pre-resettlement educational experiences of refugee youth tend to remain obscure in post-resettlement schools, even if they are so central to their educational trajectories (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Such challenges can be exacerbated by the ambivalent context of refugees’ reception by their local community, school, teaching staff, and fellow students (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003; Lee, 1996, 2005; Lucas, 1996), especially in locales without extensive experience with migration and refugee resettlement, such as predominantly white, rural areas that can display the geographical markings of racism refugees of color face (Edgeworth, 2015).

Despite challenges, refugees most often bring with them a deep commitment to education and want to invest in it, at times in ways that may be misunderstood by teachers and school staff. For example, cases where parents do not come to parent-teacher conferences or school events, or respond to letters written by the schools, can be misunderstood as lack of care in

the educational process, when, in fact, lack of understanding of the education system, impossible job schedules, or lack of English skills keep parents from interacting directly with the schools. This interaction is a highly valued form of parental involvement in middle and upper-middle class US school environments (Lareau, 2000; Robinson & Volpe, 2015). Under other circumstances, there is abundant involvement on behalf of refugee youth, but it is done by extended family members and close family friends whom parents may trust for a more suitable communication with the school system. However, these individuals are not officially recognized by schools as “family members” and legally cannot receive information about the refugee students. This places schools and families in a dilemma that slows the process of fruitful communication in the students’ best interest, suggesting a need for educational institutions to further examine notions of family in order to include forms of family structure that are common among resettled refugees who need as wide a network as possible to succeed (Gichiru, 2016).

This expanding knowledge of the subtleties found in transition and adaptation points to the need to bring ongoing research findings into teacher education curriculum and generate learning opportunities for teacher candidates that are both intellectual and affective. In other words, future teachers need opportunities to learn major frameworks about the difficulties of adaptation for refugee students, detailed examples of how these frameworks structure the experiences of refugee students, and opportunities to bring these facts into affective contexts of understanding, working with and serving students whose differences from the mainstream educational structure tend to marginalize them in schools. One possibility for such learning opportunities is found in well-conceptualized, justice-oriented service-learning opportunities that can cultivate both knowing and caring and deepen the disposition for such care in future educators. Well-conceptualized service-learning opportunities enhance in teachers a sense of “cultural humility” (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016) and offer a foundation for self-reflection, the interruption of biases, and the ability to become “learning servants” (Kirkland, 2014). Teachers who learn to both know and care, as well as continue to learn and care once they enter the field, are better equipped to recognize the diversity of challenges faced by refugee students in their own classrooms.

### **Task 2: Active Engagement With Both Conceptualizing and Enacting Effective Education With Refugee Students Within and Against Public Schools Structures**

Building on the ongoing understanding of refugee students’ challenges, there is a great need for teachers and teacher educators to examine the ways in which they frame who refugees are, their work with them, and the different school-based strategies that can be used for the success of refugee youth. Current literature on school-based strategies continues to point to the dearth of research on the specifics of evidence-based practices that serve refugee students well (Block, Cross, Riggs, & Gibbs, 2014; Mendenhall et al., 2017; Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). In their concisely presented and extensive review of the literature that does exist, Moinolnolki and Han (2017) identified five main evidence-based successful strategies: (a) a welcoming school environment that also seeks collaboration with students’ communities; (b)

“funds of knowledge” practices that capitalize in school on students’ previously acquired knowledge and depositions; (c) multicultural and culturally relevant teaching that resists deficit models about refugee youth, as well as involving all staff and students to decrease biases and potential ill treatment and bullying by peers; (d) bilingual integration where English language and culture supplement rather than replace the first languages and cultures of refugee youth; and (e) holistic, inclusive co-teaching in which collaboration among curriculum teachers and ESL teachers is central as they work together with families and community members. Similarly, Mendenhall et al. (2017) echo some of these strategies as they focus ethnographically on one high school and examine the specific needs of secondary-level refugee youth, as well as ways in which the school met these needs. Their identified, key school-based factors included teachers’ display of care and encouragement, learner-centered pedagogy and linguistic support, and flexibility in assessment strategies, as well as educators’ receiving support in working with refugee youth.

Both the one-school focus and the overview of the literature thus point to the need for teacher educators to actively participate in both conceptualizing and enacting effective education with refugee students within and against public schools structures. In the daily practice and complex dynamics of teaching, there is, evidently, a difference between knowing about these strategies and applying them with one’s own students, or resisting the rigid administrative and curricular structures that may exist in some schools and that stifle new teachers’ genuine enthusiasm for innovatively adaptive pedagogy with refugee youth. Future teachers thus need to be equipped with knowing “what works” and also be empowered to advocate for their students and confront or reject expected courses of action when they assess that their own students’ needs are not being met. School-based staff need to more carefully and critically examine the different backgrounds and experiences of each refugee group of students and create different forms of responses and educational interventions based upon those specific needs (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). They should also be able to recognize that group identities should not overshadow individual circumstances, but inform them for positive action. A pedagogy that is attuned to the details of refugee students’ circumstances builds upon their strengths and resilience and is therefore grounded in a funds of knowledge, assets-based approach (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). For example, an overview of refugee student experiences pre-resettlement showed that most students experience a teacher-centered pedagogy in the countries of first asylum, suggesting that transitions to settings that require active student engagement may be difficult (Dryden-Peterson, 2016). By better understanding and also integrating the cultures, languages, and histories of refugee youth and their families in school-based settings, teachers can learn to recognize signs of need and begin to develop classroom and school environments where students can see themselves and their own lives in the curriculum, assignments, and activities of the school itself. Indeed, instead of adopting an instructional or school model that focuses on what refugee students are missing or do not have, scholars have begun to advocate for approaches that recognize the potential of each individualized set of refugee students and build upon their unique set of strengths and resilience (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; Keddie, 2012). Teachers equipped across the contextual, sociological, and social knowledge domains are therefore essential in enacting these approaches, at times despite the institutional parameters in which they work.

Educators need to carefully examine the ways in which schools are not always structured to account for and address the specialized needs of refugee students around language learning, interrupted education, and trauma students often face. Some examples of schools that are attempting to better meet the needs of refugee students are newcomer schools that are specially designed to include refugee students new to the country and possibly new to the experience of being a student in a formal schooling environment. Staffed with faculty and support staff who have specialized training and experience in working with refugee youth, these newcomer schools provide refugee youth support in all facets of being enrolled in a public school, including the enrollment process, learning English as an additional language, and becoming accustomed to the schooling and classroom environment in a US setting. They also strive to meet the counseling and psychosocial needs a refugee student might have (Arnot & Pinson, 2005; Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012). Within all of their work with refugee students and their families, teachers and other school staff seek to create an ethos of inclusion, celebrate the unique cultures and historical backgrounds of all children, and focus on both academic and more holistic growth for enrolled students (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012). At the same time, teachers need to be aware of the possible concerns with such structural approaches, namely, the ways in which they might further serve to segregate students from their peers who are enrolled in more traditional public school settings within the same district or perhaps even within the same building if two schools are housed in the same building. Teachers therefore need to be able to examine, assess, and critique the educational structures with which they work, both those that are evidently detrimental to refugee youth and those that are positive but need to be maintained under critical evaluation.

### **Task 3: Ongoing Reflection and Reconceptualization of the Tensions That Arise in Academic and Identity Work With Refugee Youth**

The demographic backgrounds and the lived realities of refugee students are ever-changing, especially as war and civil unrest across the world increasingly spur forced movement of peoples (Oikonomidou, 2014, 2015). As these shifts occur, so too must the field's conceptualization and practical work with refugee students and their families. There is a clear need for more complex thinking about how we meet the needs of these students, with a focus on the tensions that present themselves in doing this work across different cultures, different ethnic communities, and individual groups of students. One tension within these shifting ideas emerges from the push and pull forces of assimilation and accommodation, especially for refugee youth and family members who have faced a great deal of dislocation and trauma. Refugee youth generally want to be welcomed into new schools and be accepted into the social fabric and social lives of student groups at the schools they attend. Simultaneously, these same youth are closely tied to their own ethnic and cultural groups and traditions at home. Teachers who work with refugee students and their families then need to continually re-examine such central questions: What does it mean to be an "American" for teachers of refugee students and for the refugee students themselves? How do refugee youth conceptualize their identities as students in the contexts of US or other Western nations' public schools as "being the only one" from their group in a class and as being racialized

youth? How do they make sense of their own identities as they think about their own family and culture, and across countries, especially considering the intersectionality of identities refugee youth present, such as being a white refugee from the Balkans, a black Muslim refugee from a well-educated family, or a Christian Asian refugee in the United States (Fruja Amthor, 2017)? What happens when the teacher candidates themselves are from refugee backgrounds and encounter disjuncture between their own cultural and religious understandings of education and care and authoritative professional expectations in the placement settings (Massing, 2018)? How are these considerations of youth identity formation complicated by the incredibly varied ways in which students leave their home countries, the experiences they have in refugee camps, and the nature of the schools that receive them? Amid these questions, identity, positioning, and belonging emerge as central facets of the educational experiences for refugee youth, aspects that are deeply entrenched in learning and progressing academically. Teacher education programs need to embed specific opportunities for future teachers to engage with these questions, but to do so not only *about* the identity of “others” but also and especially about teachers’ own identities. In doing this, teachers begin to position themselves within the spectrum of diversity, with their own social positions and narratives that interact with those of their students in positive or challenging ways. In this manner, teachers would engage and practice the personal knowledge domain so vital in this work.

Because of the increasingly diverse shifts in the demographic backgrounds and lived realities of refugee students, we also suggest that teachers consider the tension that exists between attempting to advance the role of genuine cross-cultural relationships over traditional forms of cross-cultural competence in multicultural educational spaces (Fruja & Roxas, 2016). We argue that teachers need to consider that work with refugee students is not just about obtaining information about one particular group to gain only cross-cultural competence, but also about being able to establish connections and relationships with students, their caregivers, and other members of the local community, especially as refugee students from different countries begin to build their own sense of community within a school or local area. In this manner, they would be able to participate in “ethical care” (Hos, 2016), which also involves care for the students’ empowerment and future. In establishing these patterns or genuine relationships and care, we also argue that teachers would abdicate the search for cultural authenticity implied in some multicultural education practice in favor of facilitating cultural agency for refugee youth—inviting them into self-definition and aiming to understand how they themselves conceive their identities in the process of adaptation and schooling. Teachers need to be prepared to focus not on trying to understand narrow notions of students’ culture—because it is always evolving—but to more fully understand how students are operationalizing their cultural agency in their new surroundings in public schools and communities and how these operationalizations can be channeled into academic participation and success.



## Conclusion

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The work of teachers with refugee youth is complex and complicated by many factors, including unresolved trauma, interrupted patterns of schooling, and an ambivalent context of reception by public schools in countries of reception for refugee youth. However, research suggests that public schools can make an impact in their work with refugee youth through intentional commitment to learning more about the refugee youth and their families; a holistic approach to education and student well-being; strong leadership; and an approach that stresses inclusion and the provision of resources, time, and attention to the learning and social-emotional needs of refugee students (Block et al., 2014; Gabriel, Roxas, & Becker, 2017; Rutter, 2006). Moreover, attention should continue to be given as to how teachers and school communities more generally can begin to establish and develop school-based strategies to support refugee students as they build new routes to future academic and professional success, routes that “transcend cultural, structural, and spatial boundaries” (Oikonomidou, 2014). Much of the knowledge we have about working with newcomer youth originates in studies focused mostly on immigrants, and more work is needed to examine the specific dynamics emerging from refugee resettlement processes—including group-specific facets—and their consequences for schooling and academic achievement (Moinolnolki & Han, 2017). It is also rare that we gain detailed insight into effective approaches through actual program descriptions and analysis (Block et al., 2014), and more of these study types would enhance the field of teacher education for the benefit of some of its most vulnerable students: refugee youth.

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