

SUPPORTING SYRIAN REFUGEE STUDENTS IN ALBERTA: A PRIMER

Anja Dressler, PURE Award, "Educational Support of Syrian Refugee Children in Alberta Schools"

The Government of Alberta is committed to providing a welcoming new home for those fleeing violence in their homeland. Alberta Education is working to ensure resettlement happens in a thoughtful and helpful way that strengthens our communities.

- 2015-16 Education Annual Report

SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

Starting in 2011, a governmental backlash against citizens demanding democracy led to a civil war in Syria. Fleeing this war, Syrians became the world's largest refugee population (Warner, 2017). This civil war between different groups and has been fought primarily in urban centres, leading to devastating damage to the infrastructure. Millions of Syrians fled and sought refuge in surrounding countries such as Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Jordan. Many of them remain in these countries. In 2015 the Canadian government pledged to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees (Skidmore, 2016). A large number of these refugees are school-aged children and need quality education. By the time Syrian refugee children settle in a country, they are likely to be missing years of schooling and will have witnessed or been the victims of violence and abuse before fleeing Syria.

REFUGEE VS IMMIGRANT VS ASYLUM SEEKER

Immigrants are people who decide to move to a new country for various reasons, like economic or social prospects. Refugees come not by choice, but by necessity. Syrian refugees were forced from their homes because of the Syrian civil war. They come to Canada after a long journey of hardships and trauma, in need of a safe place to live and raise their families. An asylum seeker is someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed. Most Syrians arrived in Canada as refugees, but most arrived in Europe as asylum seekers

SLIFE

Many refugee students are Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE). While fleeing, students have no schooling and because familial needs, such as working to provide food for money, frequently take precedence over going to school. Girls often do not attend school due to cultural expectations. These expectations pose unique challenges when girls do get the chance to go to school in Canada and need to adapt to different cultural expectations.

REFUGEE STUDENT CODING

Alberta Education code 640 is given to refugee students who have limited or disrupted formal schooling and, at the current level cannot grade level work and need extra supports and services.

BEST PRACTICES

Culturally relevant pedagogy

This is teaching that takes cultural differences into account and works to bridge the gap in order to respect Syrian culture while still teaching about Canadian culture in an explicit manner.

Trauma-informed pedagogy

To combat past trauma in students, teachers use the three pillars: developing safety; promoting healing relationships; and teaching self-management and coping skills to help students. This approach gives students a future foundation for success.

MALP

The Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm stresses that teachers provide lessons with immediate relevance and interconnectedness, combined oral and written tasks, shared and individual responsibility, and balance concrete tasks with abstract knowledge.

Community partnerships

Whenever possible schools and classes should create partnerships with the outside community and organizations. These partnerships can serve to provide refugee families with valuable services, and also help refugees to forge important relationships.

Whole school approach

Refugee students should be included in the school community so that they make a variety of friends, feel welcome, and the transition to mainstream classes is supported.

Selected References

Alberta Government (2016). Annual education report. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3272568/alberta-education-annual-report-2015-16.pdf>

DeCapua, A. (2016). Building bridges to academic success through culturally responsive teaching. *MinneTESOL*, Spring(1). Retrieved from <http://minnetesoljournal.org/spring-2016/building-bridges-to-academic-success-through-culturally-responsive-teaching>

Skidmore, J. (2016). From discord to harmony: How Canadian music educators can support young Syrian refugees through culturally responsive teaching. *Canadian Music Educator*, 7–13.

Warner, Warner, J. (2017). No lost generations: Refugee children and their human right to education, from the holocaust to the Syrian civil war (Order No. 10261472). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1886442883).

RESOURCES AVAILABLE

Alberta Association of Immigrant
Serving Agencies
<http://aaisa.ca/>

Alberta ESL Benchmarks
http://www.learnalberta.ca/content/eslapb/search_about.html

Alberta Government: Syrian
Refugees
<https://www.alberta.ca/syrian-refugees.aspx>

Building Hope: Refugee Learner
Narratives
http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/building_hope/index.html

Calgary Catholic Immigration
Services
<https://www.ccisab.ca/>

Canadian Government: Syrian
Refugees
<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/welcome/index.asp>

Supporting Every Student
Learning Series
<https://policywise.com/initiatives/ses/>

Syrian Refugee Crisis Information
<http://syrianrefugees.eu/>



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