Supporting the linguistic and socio-emotional development of refugee and asylum-seeking children in UK schools: Webinar write up

*Amy Ashlee (Refugee Education UK) and Professor Jo McIntyre (University of Nottingham)*

Analysis of stock images on ‘refugee education’ reveals a concerning pattern: refugee education is depicted as happening to children outside of Europe, often in resource-scarce, temporary classrooms and involving outmoded pedagogies (McIntyre et al., forthcoming). The message conveyed by the media when using such images is far removed from the reality of education provision for refugee children across the UK.

In the book ‘Refugee Education: Theorising Practice in Schools’ (McIntyre and Abrams, 2021), Professor Jo McIntyre demonstrates that refugee education can and should be understood as encompassing holistic, sustainable strategies for inclusive practice. She argues that three concepts – based on Kohli’s ‘resumption of ordinary lives’ – should underpin refugee education provision: safety, belonging and succeeding. The definitions of each of these concepts in practice have been co-constructed with teachers in Jo’s case study schools.

This view of refugee education is shared by the charity Refugee Education UK (REUK) in its work supporting young refugees and asylum seekers to build positive futures through education. To help make the theoretical framing of refugee education accessible to educational professionals supporting refugee children, REUK and the University of Nottingham (through a partnership with Jo) have been collaborating to develop a refugee education framework for schools. Using the concepts of safety, belonging and succeeding a lens, and providing suggestions for practical steps across different levels of engagement, the framework includes six considerations: access, language learning, curriculum learning, wellbeing, progression and school culture.

Language learning is a theme that has featured prominently in findings of REUK research (Ashlee and Gladwell, 2020; Gladwell and Chetwynd, 2018). As one of the six considerations, the framework outlines practical steps that can support refugee children’s learning of and in the language of their new environment, as well their continued engagement with their mother tongue. These steps are crucial for:

* safety, including by nurturing social-emotional learning and trusting relationships with school staff
* belonging, including by supporting peer relationships and positive identity formation
* succeeding, including by enabling the realisation of young people’s full potential.

The refugee education framework for schools, along with a training module for teachers, will be coming soon.

**References**

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