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Abstract

Both the United States (US) and New Zealand (NZ) have been resettling refugees since the Second World War. As such, and because of several international treaties signed by both countries, they must concern themselves with the education of resettled refugee students in their nations. In this study, the researchers examine the international agreements and national resettlement policies that shape these nations' refugee education policies. Second, educational practices for refugee students in the US and NZ using phenomenological qualitative research based on observations, interviews, and focus groups with teachers and refugee students are examined. The researchers conclude that the more systematic methods of resettlement and educational tools available to teachers in NZ through consistent national policies provide better opportunities for success than policies and practices that vary widely from state to state and even within states in the US.

Keywords

resettlement, education, qualitative research

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Refugee-Background Students in New Zealand and the United States: Roots and Results of Educational Policies and Practices

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Abstract

Both the United States (US) and New Zealand (NZ) have been resettling refugees since the Second World War. As such, and because of several international treaties signed by both countries, they must concern themselves with the education of resettled refugee students in their nations. In this study, the researchers examine the international agreements and national resettlement policies that shape these nations' refugee education policies. Second, educational practices for refugee students in the US and NZ using phenomenological qualitative research based on observations, interviews, and focus groups with teachers and refugee students are examined. The researchers conclude that the more systematic methods of resettlement and educational tools available to teachers in NZ through consistent national policies provide better opportunities for success than policies and practices that vary widely from state to state and even within states in the US.

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Introduction

Both New Zealand (NZ) and the United States (US) began resettling refugees at the time of the Second World War, and both have active, ongoing resettlement programs, although NZ has doubled its intake since 2016 from 750 to 1,500; the US has cut its program from 85,000 during President Obama's last year in office (2016) to a maximum of 18,000 in 2020 (American Immigration Council, 2019; De Peña & La Corte, 2019). The researchers explore policies and practices of the countries affecting refugee resettlement and education to understand the ways in which NZ and the US accommodate refugee-background students and support education for resettled refugees.

The world's refugee population at its highest recorded—nearly 26 million, almost doubled since 2012. Some refugees repatriate to their home countries if it becomes safe to do so. Others integrate into the host community to which they fled. The durable solution of resettlement into a third country is the least likely opportunity for a refugee, at less than one percent of all refugees. However, it is the solution that directly involves immigration to a developed country such as the

two in our study. Over 80% of refugees are hosted in developing regions (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021). Of the 1.4 million refugees that the UNHCR estimated in need of resettlement, 92,400—less than 10%—actually received resettlement in 2019. Over half of this number were children.

A nation's schools provide far more than instruction in academic subjects. A primary function of schooling is to socialize children into the culture and expectations of the country so that they can become active and conscientious citizens, building the economy and leading social and political institutions. Although the numbers of resettled refugee students may be small, it is important to understand the ways in which resettlement countries provide these benefits of schooling to resettled refugees and to promote practices that generate successful outcomes (Drewery, 2016). The primary research question of this study is as follows: In what ways do refugee policies and practices in the respective countries provide support for refugee-background students?

Literature Review

Because the researchers examined the role of policy in this study, they emphasized appropriate international conventions, laws, and policies in the review, as follows.

Foundations for Resettlement and Refugee Education

Neither NZ nor the US had a distinctive refugee policy prior to World War II, but both began taking in refugees at that time (Daniels, 2006; Marlowe & Elliott, 2014). New Zealand became a signatory to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) in 1960 and the 1967 Protocol in 1973. The nation recognizes refugees, who are processed outside of NZ and typically recommended by the UNHCR for resettlement. The US never signed the 1951 agreement, but it did sign the 1967 Protocol in 1968.

The 1951 Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol addressed education of refugees as follows:

1. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees the same treatment as is accorded to nationals with respect to elementary education.
2. The Contracting States shall accord to refugees treatment as favorable as possible, and, in any event, not less favorable than that accorded to aliens generally in the same circumstances, with respect to education other than elementary education and, in particular, as regards access to studies, the recognition of foreign school certificates, diplomas and degrees, the remission of fees and charges and the award of scholarships (Article 22).

Other international documents that include rights to education are the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which both nations ratified, states that:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional educational shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (p. 7).

Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) proclaims similar rights to education. It was signed by NZ in 1968 and ratified in 1978. The US was a signatory in 1977 but has not ratified the document. Finally, the Convention on the Rights

of the Child (1989) affords the same educational rights as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 28). New Zealand ratified the document in 1993. The US is the only UN member state that has not ratified this convention (Office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2020). Conservative Republicans suggest that the treaty would “usurp American sovereignty” (Economist, 2013, p. 3). However, even without the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the other international agreements provide a framework of requirements for compulsory elementary education and equitable additional education.

As a result of international agreements and ongoing refugee resettlement, the US passed the Refugee Act of 1980, championed by Edward Kennedy and signed into law by President Carter, which provided for specific governmental structures, such as the Office for Refugee Resettlement, as well as policies for refugee quotas and the admissions process. It prioritized the importance of work for refugees to become self-sufficient as quickly as possible. The act references education with respect to job training and English language learning for adults.

New Zealand’s Immigration Act of 1987 provided a framework to address refugee claims for resettlement. Its recent Refugee Resettlement Strategy, signed in 2012 and delivered in stages over the past several years, provides for specific goals and policy implementation. The strategy is a comprehensive document aimed at improving outcomes for newly arrived refugees in key areas including education (Ministry of Business, Innovation, and Employment [MBIE], n.d.). The recommendations apply to all stages of settlement from pre-arrival through to social integration at the five-year mark.

Refugee Reception

At the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre just outside of Auckland, refugees complete a six-week orientation program; this was to become a five-week program in 2020 due to increased resettlement numbers. The educational component of this program includes learning about the laws and culture of NZ and attending English language lessons. Approximately 125 refugees attend each session. While residing at the newly rebuilt reception center, they also undergo a health screening and learn about the area in which they will be resettled. The children attend school or pre-school at the center. There is always a *pōwhiri* (formal Māori welcome ceremony) before individuals and families depart for one of numerous resettlement areas in NZ. The *pōwhiri* enables the juxtaposition of the Western cultural goal of *doing* and independence with *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori world) cultural values of *ora*—well-being—and *whanaungatanga*, relationship, contrasts that are constantly negotiated in NZ. This practice provides respect for diversity and the importance of welcoming newcomers.

The NZ government expects measurable indicators of success for each of the Strategy’s goals in self-sufficiency, social participation, health and well-being, education, and housing. Most of the indicators link to self-sufficiency; for example, the housing indicator includes the phrase that former refugees are living “independently of government housing assistance” (MBIE, n.d., p. 3). For self-sufficiency, the indicator is that “all working age refugees are in paid work or are supported by a family member in paid work” (MBIE, n.d., p. 3). Those providing services for former refugees, as well as researchers and former refugees themselves, agree that work can positively influence a resettled refugee’s well-being (Hayward, 2017; McBrien, 2014). Refugee-background adults frequently describe depression resulting from long-term unemployment

(Pernice & Brook, 1996). However, researchers are generally in agreement that the important elements of health, cultural and linguistic understanding, and skills training or requalification for employment are essential pre-requisites for successful resettlement, entering the workforce, and acculturation (Hayward, 2017; Marlowe et al., 2014; McBrien, 2014).

With respect to secondary school students and adults, intensive language skills are needed before they can comprehend subject matter and advanced academic concepts, so they need to be allowed time to gain language skills and then to enter further academic study or training programs. This is a particular challenge for refugee youth arriving in NZ with significant prior schooling gaps. After leaving Mangere, the Red Cross manages the resettlement indicators, typically working with families for 1-2 years. Indicator goals are expected at the 5-year point in resettlement.

Refugees arriving in the US have very different experiences. Upon arrival into the country, they are met by representatives of one of nine official refugee resettlement agencies at the airport, and they are brought to an apartment that has been arranged for them. Agency representatives schedule a second meeting within several days to begin the refugees' introduction to US culture and expectations: language needs, medical assistance, employment expectations, and school registration for children. Refugees receive medical assistance and can apply for Refugee Cash Assistance during their first eight months in the US if they are not receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families or Supplemental Security Income. In 2019, a family of two with no income would receive \$420/month. Once they earn over \$839/month, they are no longer eligible for Refugee Cash Assistance.

After that, the Office of Refugee Resettlement supports additional programs in the fields of health, employment, and integration, primarily through the nine resettlement agencies and their affiliates. The assistance that agencies can provide varies, based on what they are able to receive through competitive grants. Because of US policies spearheaded by the Trump administration in 2017 to cut refugee entrants, refugee support organizations are struggling to maintain operating budgets and employees. Many have had to close or repurpose their services (Alvarez, 2018). The federalized strategy used in NZ provides more consistent support to resettled refugees than national assistance in the US, which is bolstered mainly through competitive grants.

Educational Policy

New Zealand is roughly equivalent in size to the state of Oregon with a population of 4.8 million. According to the 2018 census, 64% have European ancestry, and 16.5% are of Māori background (StatsNZ, 2020). Since the late 20th century, the Ministry of Education (MoE) has recognized and supported the growth of *kōhanga reo*, preschools of Māori language immersion; and *kura*, or primary/secondary schools that use Māori language and philosophy for instruction. The MoE developed a specific strategy to support Māori background learners, *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success 2008–2012*, which it updated with revised strategies for 2013-2017 (MoE, n.d.a). It is based on respecting Māori language and culture, and using the Māori philosophical approach of *ako*, a reciprocal approach in which students and teachers learn from one another. This focus in the NZ education system, although controversial at the time, created attitudinal and behavioral responses in schools that show acceptance of more than one code (language, social, spiritual, etc.) and that can coincide in a symbiotic way. This bicultural focus creates a pathway for multicultural and diverse approaches amongst educators (Drewery, 2016). This ideal, however, is far from the

current reality. Berryman et al. (2017) research indicates ongoing underachievement and inequities of schooling for Māori students.

The educational goal in the NZ Refugee Resettlement Strategy is for 67% of refugee-background secondary school students who have attended NZ schools for at least five years to reach the National Certificate of Educational Achievement Level 2 or its equivalent (MBIE, n.d.). Level 2 is the achievement needed for semi-skilled employment or for competency to progress to a vocational/technical institution. This goal is the same as for all NZ students. Given the expectations are equal for both NZ and refugee students, this policy recognizes the abilities of immigrants and expects high standards for all students. The overlooked students in this group are older adolescents who mostly have not been able to reach this standard within the short timeframe of their schooling in NZ (less than five years). Teachers who teach refugees found this MoE goal *honorable*, but not practical (teacher interview, 2015). However, the MoE also offers a program called the NZ Youth Guarantee (n.d.b) that is available to all youth who need support transitioning from school to more education, work, and training.

In contrast to the NZ Strategy, there are no specific national policy goals for refugee students in the US. The 1980 Refugee Act has one sentence regarding refugee children's education:

ASSISTANCE FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN- The Director is authorized to make grants, and enter into contracts, for payments for projects to provide special educational services (including English language training) to refugee children in elementary and secondary schools where a demonstrated need has been shown (Sect. 412[d][1]).

Of course, this may not be surprising, as the US Constitution does not include education as a national right. Instead, the 10th Amendment of the US Constitution gives states the right to provide for education, because it is not in the original Bill of Rights. In the US, each state has an education article in its constitution. However, the federal constitution influences ways in which states provide education. For instance, the 14th Amendment requires equal protection under the law, and the First Amendment both allows for free exercise of religion and non-establishment of religion.

Information on state laws with respect to immigration and education is always included in annual reports published by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Reports from the last five years (NCSL, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019, 2020) covered two topics:

1. *Secondary School Civics*: States began to use information from the federal exam for immigrants to become naturalized citizens in their high school curricula (Arizona, Idaho, Louisiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah in 2015; Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Montana, Nevada, and West Virginia in 2017; Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania in 2018; and Nebraska and Texas in 2019).
2. *University Tuition*: States began either to provide for or prohibit in-state university tuition and/or scholarships for various categories of migrants (primarily those with unlawful immigration status and/or those granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). NCSL provides a comprehensive list of state bills providing for or barring these opportunities on its website (NCSL, 2021).

Neither topic related to immigration has particular importance for refugees. No refugee-specific state policies are mentioned in the reports over the past five years.

Given states' rights with respect to setting educational policy, there is no consistent policy for funding a primary factor in academic success: fluency in English. In 2020, the Education Commission of the States published a 50-state comparison of English learner policies. The

research found that states use one of four methods to fund English language programs. There are two basic methods for determining English language learning needs. Over half of the states include specific pre-service and professional development requirements for general classroom teachers. Most states include statutes or regulations for professional development, teaching standards, certifications or endorsements for teachers of English as a second language (Education Commission of the States, 2020). With respect to English language instruction, programs vary considerably. They range from students receiving all of their instruction in English to bilingual-bicultural models (Education Commission of the States, 2014).

New Zealand does not have a comprehensive constitution. However, the country's Education Act of 1877 provided for free and compulsory education (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2020). The NZ MoE actively supports educating refugee newcomers in schools. It devotes numerous pages on its website and in print publications to information about the refugee journey and the needs of refugee-background students, including challenges they face, supports for students, and funds to support language learning. The MoE website includes other refugee-specific information, such as background materials on the countries from which recent refugees come, and a free book about refugee-background students and appropriate program design and delivery (MoE, 2003; MoE, 2020). It holds regular meetings with Mangere education staff that the researchers have attended.

The MoE has developed and piloted a new program for teaching and evaluating English language learning called English Language Learning Progressions. The booklets and professional development for teachers are explained and delivered online, free of charge (Nicholls & van Hees, 2008). In contrast, English language acquisition for refugee students in the US varies considerably between and within the states, depending on policies of each state's Department of Education. In 2017, the Migration Policy Institute published a report to examine US refugee integration, specifically looking at the four states with the highest levels of refugee populations: California, Florida, New York, and Texas (Fix et al., 2017). Only one of the 33 pages reports on education. It describes no educational outcomes or goals for refugee students. In summary, it states that refugees arrive with widely varying educational backgrounds, and that the services they receive vary, depending on where they are resettled. Tonogbanua (2019) reported that some states with *English only* policies have provided inadequate language learning classes for immigrant students.

Methods

This paper describes a secondary analysis of a subset of a larger study completed by the first author in 2014 (McBrien, 2014) along with research co-conducted with the second author (Hayward, 2017). For this study, the researchers were interested in how policy translates into practice. They conducted phenomenological qualitative research between February-July 2014, and in October 2015 and September 2016, using observations, interviews, and document analysis to examine educational practices with refugee students. Their purpose in using phenomenology was to describe the experience of educating refugee students in NZ and the US (Polkinghorne, 1989). The 2014 research occurred when McBrien was a policy fellow in NZ reviewing the new Resettlement Strategy during a sabbatical. The following year, McBrien returned to NZ and conducted some follow-up research with Hayward. In 2016, Hayward traveled to the US to conduct educational research with McBrien in a southern state.

Sample

Chosen sites included centers and schools in NZ and the US. Work at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Center was based on observations of over 300 refugee residents in classroom settings during the research periods. Interview and focus group data for this study occurred at four NZ schools (two elementary and two secondary), and Mangere with staff and refugee participants in interviews and focus groups. This involved interviewing eight teachers, 16 students, and four agency staff employees at their places of employment. In part, the NZ MoE regional refugee education advisors were relied upon to help the researchers select schools and participants based on resettled refugee populations in the districts. However, Hayward is the Manager of the Mangere Refugee Education Centre and therefore has constant, direct access to resettled refugees and teachers.

In the US, the research was conducted at two refugee agencies in two southern states, three private and two public schools (two elementary and three secondary) with large percentages of refugee students (30% or more), and three regional refugee networks. Interviews were held with two principals, four teachers, and ten students at their schools. Access to participants was gained through McBrien’s volunteer work with the agencies and networks. In cases of both countries’ participants, consent letters detailing protections were provided, explained, and signed before research was conducted.

Table 1. Participants Quoted in This Study

Pseudonym*	Role	Country
Amanda	Teacher	US
Barbara	Teacher	NZ
Deirdre	Teacher	NZ
Hana	Teacher	NZ
Nancy	Teacher	NZ
Sarah	Teacher	NZ
Faduma	Student	US/Sudan
Layla	Student	US/Iraq
Sozan	Student	US/Iraq
Tara	Student	US/Afghanistan

Note: NZ: New Zealand; US: United States.

*Given the high number of participants, inclusion of all here is not possible.

Data Collection

Field notes and audio recordings were incorporated to transcribe and code. Although the research question was used to look for themes, the researchers were also invested in emerging themes to ensure that important concepts that may not arise from the research question were not overlooked (Thomas, 2006). Member checks with between researchers’ coded transcripts were conducted to increase validity (Golafshani, 2003). The research was approved by the researchers’ academic institutional review boards.

Findings

The research question used in this research was as follows: In what ways do refugee policies and practices in NZ and the US support refugee-background students? Previous sections considered

international documents that require the countries to provide education for refugee students. National policies affecting provisions for refugee education were analyzed. Going forward, educational practices that support or hinder refugee education in NZ and the US will be examined. Prominent themes emerging from the coding process were teacher training, structural supports/refugee services, family inclusion, and student challenges/supports. These topics are addressed in the following sections.

Teacher Training

Through both discussions with teachers and analyzing documents, the researchers discovered that both university colleges of education in the US and NZ typically offer teacher candidates courses in child development, educational psychology, using multiple methods and strategies for diverse learners, as well as learning about the sociocultural contexts of schools. New Zealand has a curriculum document for all schools (Years 1-13) that emphasizes principles of cultural diversity, community engagement, and inclusion (gender, race, language and ability) (MoE, 2017).

New Zealand society and schools involve practices that are inclusive of the indigenous Māori population. Media have noted the resurgence of Māori language even among the White population (Graham-McLay, 2018). The researchers observed that the majority of formal meetings at schools and other public institutions begin with a *mihimihi*, an introduction spoken in the Māori language. This is quite different from a typical Western introduction. Instead of saying, for example, *Hello, my name is ____, and I am a professor at ____,* a *mihimihi* begins by welcoming the ancestors of all present. It continues by stating the speaker's mountain, river, land, and people. This custom suggests a very different understanding of social position, identity, and dignity, and it aligns with the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The importance of respecting Māori language and culture is a part of teacher training at universities, encouraging respect for multicultural teaching.

Another important difference in preparation in practice involves freedom of information. In the US, the 1981 Supreme Court case *Plyer v. Doe* determined that school personnel cannot ask the immigration status of students. As a result, teachers are not informed in advance that they will be having resettled refugee students in their classes. Although this case was designed to protect undocumented children's right to a free public US education, it can also result in less awareness on the part of the teacher and more cultural gaffs with respect to refugee students. For instance, Amanda relayed her experience during which a new student in her class panicked during a routine fire drill: "The child hid under his desk and refused to move. The siren reminded him of sounds of war." Had Amanda known she had a refugee student in her class, she could have better prepared him for what was to occur. There is no information available about refugee resettlement or resettled refugee student needs on the National Department of Education website, in contrast to the NZ MoE website.

In NZ, communities are informed in advance regarding new refugee families who will be in residence following their preparations at the Mangere Resettlement Centre. Refugee children have had six weeks of attending classrooms designed after typical NZ schools. Teachers at the Mangere Refugee Education Centre explained that they complete reports about the students which are delivered to the children's new teachers when they are settled into their new communities. Some teachers interviewed instruct their classes how to say hello in the newcomer's language in advance

of their arrival, and they provide a classroom buddy to help the new child in the first days and weeks at the school.

Of course, the difference in preparation does not eliminate the issue of bullying in NZ, and refugee students in both countries experience discrimination (McBrien, 2005). Sarah, a secondary teacher in Wellington, NZ, described a situation of physical bullying at her school that made the news: “The boy was a refugee student from Sudan. He was teased and beaten by some local students. He was actually hospitalized for two days.” Still, the ability to prepare a classroom in advance has benefits to create an initial welcoming environment.

Structural Supports

Once resettled into a NZ community, former refugees have access to a resettlement agency and a MoE Senior Advisor for Refugee and Migrant Support. During interviews with these advisors, several explained that they personally greet the new families and bring them to their children’s new schools to introduce them. They are available to the schools for case by case issues, and they help the schools understand funding available to help the students through the Refugee Flexible Funding Pool (MoE, n.d.b). Some of the advisors provide in-school trainings for the teachers to help them understand refugee experiences and conditions of the countries from which they come. In addition, NZ Vocational Pathways and the Youth Guarantee programs are designed to offer transitional initiatives for young people, including refugees, who need extra assistance to continue beyond secondary school and into pathways that are effective for setting them up with career opportunities (Youth Guarantee, n.d.).

Refugee agencies in some US school districts offer similar services. The difference is that such services are coordinated and nationalized in NZ; US services vary widely by states. The two areas in which McBrien conducted resettlement research had refugee service networks that met every 4-8 weeks. They were comprised of resettlement representatives, health providers, legal assistants, childcare providers, members of the police force, English language teachers, and many others who have an interest in supporting the community. These networks are important for problem solving, as the members come to know one another, and the services offered. When they have a refugee client with a particular need, they know who to contact for help. One of the areas also had a refugee liaison service, consisting of experienced refugee women from the same geographical areas as newcomer refugees. These liaisons were trained to work with school personnel and with the refugee families to help them learn about one another’s cultures and behaviors. A mixed methods evaluation of the service indicated its worth to both refugee families and school personnel (McBrien, 2006).

Although such practices are highly valued, they are not guaranteed through US national policies and not standardized among state policies. Unlike NZ’s national policies regarding regional refugee education coordinators or English Language Learning Progressions (Nicholls & van Hees, 2008), for example, there are no standard federal US refugee education policies. US agencies offering support beyond the initial resettlement aid to refugee newcomers are determined by competitive grants. As a result, support for education to refugees is uneven, varying from state to state, and even within states. In contrast, federalized policies such as the English Language Learning Progressions strategy provides consistent, highly researched methods to support English language learners (Te Kete Ipurangi, 2017).

In School Support

Although universities offer courses in multicultural diversity to potential educators, most teachers in both countries commented that they did not have prior training or experience with teaching refugee children. After watching Barbara, one particularly gifted teacher working with a refugee child in NZ, McBrien asked, *Where did you receive your training?* Barbara's response: "Oh, there was no training. I have learned this through trial and error." Many stated that they gained knowledge on the job through their own experiences. A small number, particularly in one geographical area in the US, said that they learned from refugee liaisons (McBrien, 2006).

Schools visited in NZ offered several effective models that respect culturally diverse models of family and that draw from Māori notions of family involvement. They included schools on both the North and the South Islands. One centralized the school as a family learning space. During school hours, the campus provided space and instructors for adult family members to learn English and other skills. This mostly benefitted refugee mothers, who would otherwise stay home to care for pre-school children while the school-aged ones were in classes. Fathers rarely participated, as they were typically the family members who first found employment; many of the refugee families come from cultures in which women are unused to working outside of the home. The school provided an early childhood service for the infants and preschoolers so that the mothers could attend classes. If either their child in school or a child in the childcare area required assistance, the mother would be readily available. The mothers could also have lunch with their children. Bus service was provided at a low cost for the parents, with financial aid as needed.

In addition to English classes, a home economics class was provided. Deirdre, the instructor, indicated that the class involved much more than cooking meals:

In this course, the students learn about the kinds of food we have in New Zealand and how to safely prepare them. They learn to incorporate the new foods into the spices and cooking techniques they used at home. They are learning health skills because they learn about sanitation, safe handling and cleaning food, proper temperatures for cooking, and safe ways to store leftovers. As they cook, I hear them telling each other where they found a particular bargain on local vegetables, so they are acquiring economic competencies. They relax and engage socially in a non-threatening environment while they practice their English. They even disclose personal situations, offering opportunities to be taught that, for example, women do not have to tolerate domestic abuse and where they can go for help. There's a lot more to cooking class than eating food!

A campus on the South Island had a successful model that created evening tutoring classes for refugee students with simultaneous English/vocational courses to involve adult family members. Both of these models showed respect for cultures in which family is of primary importance by providing programs for the children and adults at the same time and in the same space.

Many models in the US offer similar opportunities for family involvement, but they are often located at refugee service organizations rather than at public schools. However, there are schools that provide similar services. Two US schools visited by the researchers had created a partnership with an ethnic organization supporting refugees and other immigrants from its particular ethnic heritage. The schools created an English language program for parents two mornings/week during which the parents (primarily mothers) would arrive with their children and work on English skills. Such programs create an environment conducive to family learning. This provides an incentive for children and parents to see education as a family activity. Typically, because children are in the

school environment, and parents are either working or at home, the children learn conversational English more quickly than the parents, resulting in an imbalance in the family structure. Programs such as the example mentioned allow a more balanced opportunity for family acculturation.

Individual teachers are another powerful factor in the acculturation process of refugee students. Brazilian educator and philosopher Freire wrote, “Sometimes a simple, almost insignificant gesture on the part of a teacher can have a profound formative effect on the life of a student” (Freire 2001, p. 26). At a school in Hamilton, NZ, McBrien observed Nancy, a master English for Students of Other Languages teacher contextualize a child’s lesson in reading. The book chosen reflected the current environment: autumn in NZ. It was about collecting dried pinecones to light fireplaces and warm houses as the temperatures dropped. The teacher brought in both a closed and a dried, open pinecone as well as pine needles and leaves from deciduous trees. As the child read out loud, the teacher used the objects to show what the words meant. She asked the girl questions: “Do you use a fire in your house to keep warm? No? Me neither. What do you use?” She respected the girl’s culture and knowledge:

Did you have to heat the houses where you lived before? No, I didn’t think so! Pine trees are important trees in New Zealand. What were the trees you had in your country? Bamboo? Yes, I thought that might be it. What can you tell me about bamboo trees?

The girl had the opportunity to talk about her homeland and make connections between it and her new environment. Similarly, when conducting prior research on the interplay between academic motivation and discrimination, McBrien learned from both US and NZ students that their interactions with teachers were critical in how they responded to their new cultural environment (McBrien, 2005). Faduma expressed her interest in academic subjects by saying, “It depends on the teacher, mostly.” Students commented that some teachers belittled their cultures and responses in class. For instance, Sozan, a highly educated Iranian refugee girl, said that her history teacher taught the class that Islam brainwashed its adherents, and he refused to let her refute his claim:

We argued for an hour. Then we never spoke again until the last day of class when I tried to clarify everything. He told me I shouldn’t say such things, so the class wouldn’t hear those things. It was okay for me to have my opinion, but I shouldn’t talk. But I said it was reality and everybody ought to know the truth. And he said I could keep that truth to myself.

Another said that she was given a failing grade in physical education for refusing to wear the typical outfit of shorts required for gym classes. Layla, another refugee from Iran, recalled a moment in a class when she was the only one to raise her hand to answer a question. She said, “I mispronounced the answer. The teacher was the first one to laugh.” In spite of such experiences, the girls also stated that if they had at least one supportive teacher (who students indicated was typically their English language instructor), they were motivated to stay in school.

Two of the private and one public US schools in the study offered unique opportunities for refugee-background students. One enrolls approximately 50% refugee students and 50% US-born students. The mission of the school is to create bilingual and bicultural learning for all students. Another was an all-refugee girls’ secondary school. The school chose this mission to support young girls whose cultural backgrounds might cause them to drop out of a co-educational public school. In a focus group, the girls agreed that they felt comfortable in a single-sex school. Tara said,

I had never been in a school where boys mixed freely with girls. I felt so out of place that I could not concentrate on what the teacher was saying. I would have quit if I did not have this school to come to.

In areas with large refugee student enrollment, there are often *sheltered* spaces of learning. This was observed in a US secondary school that provided a separate area for refugee-background students. Refugee students could remain in the school for up to three years as they built language skills while also learning academic subject matter. One problem, according to teachers interviewed, was that the students felt safer in this space, so some would intentionally fail requirements to enter the mainstream school in order to stay among their refugee peers.

With respect to assessments, although standardized testing had become a part of the NZ educational system, Hana, an interviewed teacher, stated that refugee students take these tests “when they are ready.” In contrast, refugee and immigrant students in the US are subject to participating in standardized tests on a prescribed schedule whether they are ready or not.

Conclusions

In reviewing policies and this qualitative research, the authors sought answers to the research question: In what ways do refugee policies and practices in the respective countries support refugee-background students? New Zealand and the US were chosen because of the researchers’ collective expertise in both countries. Additionally, in spite of the major geographical size difference, both nations have histories with indigenous people and a long-standing commitment to refugee resettlement.

Theoretical Implications

Multiple international rights-based agreements have brought about national policies to structure and regulate refugee resettlement policies. The US still references 1980 law; NZ has a 2012 Strategy that sets five-year goals for self-sufficiency, social participation, health, education, and housing. Educational provisions in NZ are more specific, systematized, and consistent than they are in the US because of official national policies and differing state laws. Beginning with six weeks of acculturation into the NZ school culture at the Mangere Refugee Reception Centre, refugee children learn the basics of what it means to be a student in NZ. Regional MoE senior educational advisors provide similar services to all resettling regions. NZ has a researched uniform system for providing English language instruction and programs for adolescent students needing successful alternative pathways to employment. Because education is provided as a right in US state constitutions, not the national constitution, US policies and practices to support refugee education is not consistent. Additionally, financial refugee support relies in part on US resettlement agencies receiving competitive grants.

Practical Implications

In noting progression or regression in either country’s support for refugees, NZ has doubled its intake since 2016, and the US has severely reduced its intake since 2017. Per capita, NZ has resettled at twice the rate of the US. Its strategy includes a specific educational goal for refugee students to attain success. At the community level, both countries have networks of supportive, caring, and trained professionals and volunteers that provide assistance to refugee students and their families through tutoring and mentoring services, and much more. These individuals and their

organizations are critical to refugee student success. However, given the reduction of refugees to the US, many refugee agencies have had to close or reorganize their priorities, resulting in an infrastructure collapse in terms of helping resettled refugees (Karas, 2019).

Overall, the phenomenon of experiencing refugee education is more predictable and consistent in NZ than in the US due to policy specifics. The US could learn from NZ in terms of creating specific national policies for resettlement support and strategies for English language learning. Rather than requiring agencies to compete with one another on grants to help refugee-background students and families, the US could provide assistance based on needs. Finally, the US could increase respect for cultural diversity and language, as has been shown in NZ policies. Although both countries offer supportive services, specific supportive programs in the US are not consistent in all areas of need, as they are dependent on grant awards.

Limitations and Future Research

Both countries provide exemplary schooling models that include family inclusion. Regarding this important educational framework, a limitation in this research is that the authors had the opportunity to travel throughout NZ to see such inclusive models in the majority of resettlement regions. A similar research study is prohibitive in the US, given the geographic size of the country and the time range of the study. Future research could examine a wider distribution of schools and state and local policies and practices affecting the education of refugee students.

The comparative sizes of the countries create a contextual limitation. Given the size of NZ, it makes sense to have one refugee reception center for all Convention refugees. In comparison, and with respect to the greater numbers of refugees resettled in the US, one reception center would not be feasible. Even when comparing the population of a major refugee resettlement state—Florida, with a population of over 20 million—to NZ's population of under 5 million, it is hard to conceptualize a central institution that could provide the kinds of services offered at the Mangere Resettlement Centre in Auckland. However, major US resettlement cities could consider creating similar centers to improve newcomer acculturation and refugee youth understanding of school culture. Specifically, consistent specification with regards to school orientation and language learning could reduce stress for resettled refugee students upon encountering their new social community.

Worldwide, refugee populations are at record high levels (UNHCR, 2020). True refugees are not, as suggested by some politicians and media organizations, terrorists. Quite the reverse, they flee terrorism and other threats to their lives. They long for the chance at a safe life in a new country. Providing sufficient educational opportunities not only provides these newcomers with this opportunity; it also creates social cohesion and economic benefits for their country of resettlement.

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