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Equity in education for/ with refugees and migrants – towards a solidarity promoting interculturalism

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Introduction

This special issue brings to the forefront the complex educational challenges faced by migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. It focuses on different ways of understanding equity in relation to education for/with refugees and migrants. The core articles gathered for the special issue originate from the Comparative Education Society in Europe (CESE) conference on the theme of ‘Equity in and through Education’ held in Glasgow between 31 May - 3 June 2016. Thus, the special issue addresses the question of equity in diverse local, national, and transnational contexts and from an interdisciplinary approach.

Recently many countries associated with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development OECD, especially in Europe, have seen a sharp increase in the number of migrants entering their territories – including unprecedented numbers of asylum-seekers and children. An estimated 5 million permanent migrants arrived to OECD countries in 2015, an increase of about 20% relative to 2014, with family reunification and free movement accounting each for about a third of these permanent entries (OECD, 2016; OECD, 2015). In the light of current refugee crises in Europe, concerns with the equity of education have gained even more importance, because these crises challenge national education systems in Europe and beyond Europe (Kotthoff, 2016). At the same time, increased migration poses new challenges for social cohesion in some countries. Fair and inclusive education for migrants and minorities is a key to these challenges as their personal and social circumstances are often obstacles to achieving educational potential. Equity in education enhances social

cohesion and trust (OECD, 2008).

Questions about the integration of refugees and migrants and their children into society, education, and work are now slowly appearing on policy agendas (Crul et al., 2017). Drawing on the general question from the CESE 2016 conference, the special issue considers specifically how education systems and processes can be fair and inclusive in terms of access, experience, and outcomes for migrant and refugee students?

The special issue looks at the ways of understanding and improving educational equity through two particular themes: Teaching and learning with/of refugees, migrants, and forcefully immobile; and migrant children, youth, and adults' inclusion/exclusion in education. The special issue's contributions come at equity in education from different angles, and from the perspective of different stakeholders, including refugee and migrant learners, teachers and school managers, and policy makers. All the papers are concerned with issues of solidarity, togetherness and human connectedness, providing and receiving recognition within involuntary and voluntary mobility/immobility contexts.

Beyond access to education: Inclusive and fair education in diverse societies

The transient, non-linear nature of people's mobility makes us look beyond access to education and integration to the mainstream, two processes that have been the most widely analysed in the literature on refugee and migrant education. In relation to refugees and education 'the right to education' has been emphasised in global policy frameworks and discourses. Although the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights included a specific paragraph on the purposes of education, the main thrust of international education policy since 1950 has been to universalise access to primary education (and, to a lesser extent, 'fundamental' education). Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights multiple international documents have conceptualised education as a human right. These included the 1976 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Education for All summits (1990 and 2000) however

offered the most comprehensive shift in international discourse on education, highlighting its expansion to all children, youth and also adults in some international documents (McCowan 2010; Bengtsson & Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Vega & Bajaj, 2016). The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) expresses its vision as ‘universalising access and promoting equity’ (World Declaration, 1990, p. 4). During the current refugee crises, through the work of UNICEF, a range of host countries’ governments, and NGOs, it is increasingly recognised that education delivered in a safe environment can provide recovery, healing, and empowerment for the vulnerable, forcefully displaced people. In this area, much of the international focus has been on the practical difficulties of delivering education, such as providing access to schooling, building temporary classrooms, and recruiting and training teachers (Bubbers, 2015). There has been less attention to the educational experiences and outcomes of migrants and refugees, and to concerns with equity.

Although education is a basic human right, recent research shows that children of refugees are five times more likely to be out of school than the global average. Only 50 percent of refugee children have access to primary education, while the global average is more than 90 percent. The gap widens for refugee adolescents of whom only 22 percent have the opportunity to attend secondary school, compared to a global average of 84 percent. At the higher education level, fewer than one per cent of refugees attend university, compared to a 34 percent level globally (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2016).

In recent years greater attention is being paid to the quality of education and learning outcomes, typically literacy and numeracy. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations in 2015 includes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) with its comprehensive global goal on education (SDG4). SDG4 on education is to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Importantly, SDG4 and its new targets move beyond an instrumental emphasis on foundational skills and labour market competence to include a broader set of social, political and moral purposes of education. Particularly, target 4.7 could be seen as the most ‘progressive’ in a way it

(re) introduces the aims of education that include acquisition of skills and knowledge related to human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2016). The special issue contributions engage strongly with these aims.

Concerns with equity appear frequently in policy texts (Unterhalter, 2009). For example, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development listed ‘intergenerational equity and justice’ among the major terms and values, and particularly in reference to social diversity: ‘equity and justice are also required for diverse groups in the current generation’ (UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2016). At an individual rather than societal level, McCowan (2013, p. 63) argues that education is central to fostering two human traits: agency, which ‘involves the freedom of individuals to pursue their life goals’ and understanding, which refers ‘to curiosity about and interest in the world, making possible the pursuit of an ever deeper grasp of the nature of things’. Thus, the respect for the right to education explicitly links to educational equity.

How to achieve equity? Towards a solidarity promoting interculturalism

The major inspiration for the way forward, providing a clear connection between educational equity and wider societal context, could be the concept of solidarity. Kymlicka (2015, pp. 8-9) argues after (Alexander, 2014, p. 304) that solidarity remains a central dimension of cultural, institutional and interactional life in contemporary societies. Thus the concept of ‘solidarity’ should not be neglected in social sciences and political theory. For justice to be possible, citizens need to be motivated by solidarity, not merely included by law (Calhoun, 2002, p. 153). Kymlicka (2015, pp. 10-11) believes that national solidarity will continue to play a major role in shaping the welfare state for the foreseeable future, and he considers how migrants can be part of an inclusive national solidarity. Bello (2017, p. 34) argues that the recent socio-economic crisis that affected different sectors of countries and, according to some (Kohut et al., 2011), has entailed further tensions between members of the host societies and migrants.

Although migrants are seen as both economic and cultural threats, the cultural threat is the most potent factor in creating the anti-immigrant attitudes (Kymlicka 2015). Kymlicka (2015, p. 12) gives the example of some of the coercive and paternalistic ‘integration’ policies spreading throughout Europe can be seen as a response to this challenge. For example, migrants are forced to learn the national language and to take integration classes and perform public service in return for welfare, which presumably counteract the image of not belonging and not reciprocating. In contrast to a welfare chauvinism that champions national solidarity at the expense of migrants and minorities as well as a neoliberal multiculturalism that champions mobility and diversity at the cost of national solidarity, Kymlicka (2015) identifies the prospects for ‘a multicultural national solidarity’. He suggests that we need to develop a form of multiculturalism that is tied to an ethic of social membership: that is, a kind of multiculturalism that enables immigrants to express their culture and identity as modes of participating and contributing to the national society.

In recent years, the multicultural approach championed by Kymlicka (2012) has been increasingly replaced by a new framework for intergroup relations, interculturalism (Bello, 2017, p. 34), as multiculturalism has been blamed for a lack of integration of immigrants (Lentin & Titley, 2011; Silj, 2010; Vertovec & Wassendorf, 2011), and recently has also been accused of being responsible for the escalation of terrorism (Phillips, 2006). The paradigm of interculturalism is currently presented as a new tool both to integrate immigrants better into host societies and to frame relationships between communities in more positive ways (Meer & Modood, 2012), which allow for improved dialogue and relations between different cultural groups (Sze & Powell, 2004, Bello 2017). The papers in this issue highlight the importance of paying attention to issues of equity in relation to educational provision for migrant and refugee groups in order to realise this vision.

Holistic approach to equity to enhance capabilities

Elaine Unterhalter (2009) distinguishes three different ways of thinking about equity in education: ‘equity from below’, ‘equity from above’, and ‘equity from the middle’.

She argues that all the three forms of equity are important in order to expand capabilities in education and assess equality, given human diversity. Unterhalter (2009, p. 416) looks at these different forms of equity in education stressing the active dimension separating equity from equality. She argues that equity as a process of making fair and impartial connects to how Sen think about equality in the space of capabilities. Sen's capability approach makes the argument that the metric of interpersonal comparison needs to take human diversity as a central concern (Sen, 1992). Capabilities, which represent the freedoms to achieve combinations of valued functionings are real alternatives to formulate and achieve wellbeing. Capabilities are thus responsive to heterogeneities, which are central, not incidental to how equality is conceived (Sen, 1999).

For Unterhalter, equity from below entails dialogue and discussion about the expansion of a capability set across many different points of view. Equity from below thus seems to align with the capability approach in the emphasis on agency and process freedoms (Sen, 2005). However, Unterhalter (2009) argues that equity from below cannot be sustained without an architecture of regulations and laws associated with equity from above (p. 22). Equity from above and the appeal to rules and notions of public good resonate with the concerns in the capability approach with instituting conditions for positive freedoms (Vizard, 2006; Deneulin et al., 2006). But she argues that without the flows of ideas, skill, material resources, and time that substantively expand the capability set and are associated with equity in the middle no education is delivered. Equity from the middle in education is associated with the movement of ideas, time, money, skill, organisation or artefacts that facilitates 'investments' in the learning of children or adults and the professional development of teachers. Just as money or equity stock is not in itself valuable without attendant social arrangements that confer worth, equity from the middle - be it for example forms of teacher training, or user fees, or modes of school transport - is not in itself fair or just without an articulation with equity from below and equity from above (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 21). Meanwhile, Unterhalter (2009) argues, equity from above without a specification of the nature and the limits on resources and capabilities associated with equity in the middle, and the tolerance and respect and fairness associated with equity from below,

is likely to become hollow rhetoric (p. 420). All three forms of equity are thus seen as intrinsically intertwined and co-dependent, and bringing them together is necessary in order to ‘support the expansion of a capability set and contribute to equalising capabilities in education’ (Unterhalter, 2009, p. 22).

Perspectives on equity in education for/with refugees and migrants

All the contributions of the special issue engage with these three different interrelated perspectives, on equity in relation to education for/with refugees and migrants. The issue begins with Yeşer Özer, Aysegul Komsuoglu, and Zeynep Ateşoks' paper that, in its comprehensive overview of the way in which education for refugee children is operating in Turkey, explicitly takes up the dilemma of the dual system for thinking about equity and rights. The persistence of the Syrian conflict and the growing number of urban refugees who are not about to return home anytime soon (Kirişci & Ferris, 2015) is creating a set of tough challenges for Turkey. To address these challenges the government and civil society need to ‘go beyond just hospitality’ and switch gears from policies driven by concerns of extending emergency humanitarian assistance and temporary protection to ones focusing on the long term to facilitate the possible eventual incorporation of the refugees into Turkish society (Kirişci, 2014). The paper argues that the dual system, which has emerged in urban settings creates the main challenge to a realisation of comprehensive and supportive education system and does not offer a good starting point for the future inclusion of Syrian refugees to society. The key argument of the paper is that a culture of togetherness and a common future can only be assured by an integrated education system, which ensures equal opportunity, diversity, and plurality (Özer, Komsuoglu, and Ateşok in this issue).

By exploring policy documents, together with teachers’ and school managers’ perspective, the paper links to the idea of equity from above. Data from the interviews provide both factual information about how the system with regard to education for refugees is working and the sense of what are the teachers and school managers’ views and experiences on challenges that they are dealing with, and what this might mean for thinking about issues in relation to equity. Equity from above in this contribution is about ensuring rules about fair access and participation, and

administrative regulation that institutes forms of equity (Unterhalter, 2009) across differences between host and Syrian refugee population.

The second article by Giovanna Fassetta, Maria Grazia Imperiale, Katja Frimberger, Mariam Attia, and Al-Masri, Nazmi speaks to the importance of building equity in the middle by focusing on teachers, and the role of teacher-learner connections. Provision of equity from the middle in the design and delivery of an online training course for teachers of Arabic to speakers of other languages in the Gaza Strip (Palestine) was necessary for an attempt to overcome the constraints of 'forced immobility' (Stock, 2016). This connected to processes associated with equity from below, as the paper explores the way in the reflective processes incorporated into the online learning training enabled participants to work together through their differences (Unterhalter, 2009). The paper shows how, although in a limited and imperfect way, the development of online tools for communication represents a way to counter isolation, as they offer opportunities to connect with individuals and groups worldwide and, as was the aim of the TESOL training course, as they can also open up possibilities for online forms of employment.

The authors' major aim was to investigate the provision of intercultural language education in a context of occupation and enforced isolation, developing contextualised, critical and creative online language pedagogies. Grounded in Freirean pedagogy, the course aimed to respond to the employment needs of university graduates by creating opportunities for online language teaching. The action research study explored the dynamics at play within the online educational environment, to evidence elements that challenged and facilitated effective collaboration between trainers and trainees (Fassetta et al. in this issue). While the focus here is rather different to other papers in the issue – which all look at groups that are experiencing mobility (whether voluntary or not) rather than groups that are experiencing forced immobility, the parallels between the experiences the work discussed here with a forcibly immobile group, and work with refugee and migrants communities in other contexts of the special issue can be drawn, particularly in the ways that forms of pedagogy can work across linguistic contexts. The paper makes a

significant contribution to current discussions around diversity and equity in relation to forms of mobility through its demonstration of how ‘virtual mobility’ and online work can be used to partially redress the enforced immobility of the population of the Gaza Strip, giving them a way to find online employment opportunity and to lessen their isolation.

The final three contributions by Chinga-Ramirez, North, and Klenk directly consider the refugee and migrant learners experiences. These contributions draw on ideas around agency, learner identities, and gender empowerment and explore challenges and possibilities for building equity from below through engaging with migrant and refugee learners themselves.

In the third article, Carla Chinga-Ramirez sets out to explore how the self-definition as a foreigner shapes the experiences of minority pupils in the Norwegian school. The paper discusses the mismatch between Norwegian education policy promoting diversity and tolerance and the migrant student’s own experiences of exclusion in Norwegian schools. By exploring social and cultural discourses, such as the Norwegian principle of equality understood as sameness and the author show how the invisible boundary between the normal and the abnormal, are played out in the school's context in such a way that these pupils encounter many situations that marginalize them as foreigners. By bringing out the minority pupils voices, Chinga-Ramirez argues the ethnic dimension is often made relevant in schools, even when it should be irrelevant, that this is often done in an essentialist and negative manner. Thus, the Norwegian principle of equality is under serious pressure when a large group of pupils find themselves on the outside of the equity in the school's social arena.

The fourth article by Hazel Klenk introduces research with a group of refugee women who attend ESOL classes at a community centre in London. Klenk considers the role education can play in their social integration processes employing an approach that has been developed from feminist notions of empowerment and social practice theories of literacy and language use. Through exploring the lives and experiences of

the women themselves, it suggests that an understanding of the factors that regulate their opportunities to access resources, expand agency and live lives they value from a gendered perspective is crucial for understanding how to provide more suitable avenues for refugee women's social integration in the UK.

The final article by Amy North considers the literacy learning experiences of a group of female migrant domestic workers from Nepal and India, who participated in weekly literacy support sessions in London. The paper draws on qualitative research to explore the women's engagement with different forms of learning. It shows how the ways in which they women engaged with literacy learn, and negotiated the forms of literacy support that they wanted was shaped by their own experiences as migrant women, the transnational nature of their lives, and the way they navigate and negotiate identities across different contexts. Taken together, these three papers point to the importance of listening and of paying attention to the experiences of migrant and refugee themselves, and of understanding the complex ways in which their educational experiences are bound up in their wider lives and identities as migrant learners, in order to build education spaces that support equity as well as processes of integration and empowerment.

Looking at these various approaches to equity in education for/ with migrants and refugees in a comparative perspective helps us to think about the best ways of building inclusive education and society within the specific local cases and the global/universal sense. At the supra-national level, the OECD (2008) has recommended ten steps that provide concrete targets for more equity, particularly related to school failure and dropouts, to make society fairer and avoid the large social costs of marginalised adults with few basic skills. Responding 'to diversity and provid[ing] for the successful inclusion of migrants and minorities within mainstream education' are one among these steps. Success in integrating migrants and refugees into society bears a strong connection with the efficacy of education policy and school systems in addressing the challenges of diversity and everyday social relations to help migrant and refugee students develop their skills. The papers in this issue point to the

importance but also the complexity of doing this. They suggest that building educational systems and processes that are equitable and which support the integration of migrants and refugees requires engaging with all three forms of equity, paying attention to policy, and the way that education systems are structured, and also listening to and learning from teachers and learners themselves.

We hope that the readers of *European Education* will enjoy these five original contributions as much as we have as editors and that this collection will inspire much further work on education for and with refugees and migrants.

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