Gaining Insights into the School Experiences of Refugee Children through Art and Accompanied Narratives

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Key Terms

Deficit Perspectives: is a discourse that focus solely on shortcomings and produces labels, such as disadvantages and difficult groups which are often pushed onto marginalized groups and become viewed as part of their being (Aikman et al., 2016)

Strength based approaches: this paradigm challenges the principles of deficit discourses by offering a different language that recognizes struggle and despair but chooses to build on capacities and potentials. This approach searches for marginalized voices and seeks to make them heard (Hammond & Zimmerman, 2008)

Lived Experiences: is defined as the way a person perceives his or her world as real and purposeful (Van-Manen, 1990)

Poststructuralist theory: calls for a critique and a confrontation of those taken for granted knowledge and power relations which sustain inequities (MacNaughton, 2004)

Thematic Analysis: is a tool to identify themes in a set of data . This tool aims to capture aspects from the data that connects to the research question and represent patterned meaning in the data (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018)

Background

- ❑ With the recent growth of the refugee population in Canada, it is becoming increasingly important to learn about the educational experiences of refugee children and to listen to their voices, especially since schools represent an important part of life in the host country (Nakhaie, 2017; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, 2012)
- ❑ Deficit perspectives negatively impact the refugee population, as they are often targeted for labels such as 'vulnerable' and 'subjects of trauma' (Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Bernhard, 2012)
- ❑ Consequently, hardships become regularly viewed as representing refugees' whole being, and through the deficit perspective refugees are seen as incomplete, missing, and less than others
- ❑ The purpose of the current study is to address the gap in the Canadian literature on refugees' experiences in school. Most importantly, the current study departs from the "deficit thinking" model that is often adopted in studies with refugees

Methodology

- ❑ 18 refugee students took part in the study ages (6-13) from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt
- ❑ Parents came with the participating children to a scheduled program at two community centers in Ottawa
- ❑ Data were collected using drawing analysis and accompanied narratives
- ❑ Participants were offered crayons and 4A papers to complete the drawing activity which lasted for 20-30 minutes
- ❑ Guided by Poststructuralist theoretical framework
- ❑ Ethical consideration:
- ❑ consent documents and transcripts translated in both English and Arabic

Adjustment

Figure 1. Drawing by 13 year-old Sara from Egypt.

Connection to Home

Figure 2. Drawing by 6 year-old Sami from Syria.

"Draw a Typical Day at School"

Play

Figure 3. Drawing by 9 year-old Wafaa from Syria

Learning

Figure 4. Drawing by 9 year-old Asmaa from Syria.

Positive Outlook

Figure 5. Drawing by 12 year-old salma from Syria

Findings and Discussion

- ❑ Thematic analysis was applied on the data
- ❑ Five themes were identified:
 - 1) Play
 - 2) Positive Outlook
 - 3) Learning
 - 4) Connection to home
 - 5) Adjustment
- ❑ The findings demonstrated that the lived schooling experiences of 18 Arabic speaking refugees in Ottawa (6-13-year-olds) is dominated by themes of adjustment and acceptance to the new educational environment, and a positive outlook towards their schooling specifically their through their relationships with peers and teachers. Also, the participants in the study viewed a typical day in school as one involving play but also as a day of learning

Conclusion and Implications

- ❑ Schools and teachers have an important role in fostering positive experiences
- ❑ I recommend that schools do more to support refugee students' involvement in sports that are available at schools and to reduce barriers to joining sport teams
- ❑ As hoped to be understood from the current study, there are many truths and stories are waiting to be told from refugee students' perspectives
- ❑ There are many instances in which refugees' demonstrated their resilience and strength such as in their positive outlook towards school and their adjustment to the new structure as demonstrated in the drawings, more recognition should be given to this area

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