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Editorial Note

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The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

DANA BURDE AND HEDDY LAHMANN

We are very pleased to present the spring issue of the INEE-NYU *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)*, which offers a firsthand view into a broad range of the multiple dilemmas facing those who work in education in emergencies (EiE). The issue provides actionable data and resources for policymakers who are hoping to improve the learning outcomes of children living in emergency contexts. The rigorous research and cutting-edge field notes contained in this issue continue our efforts to support equity and social justice through the production of knowledge and dissemination of evidence for the field of EiE. *JEiE* offers crucial descriptive and explanatory data from practitioners, researchers, and policymakers, and from research teams comprising all three who partnered in writing their articles. These team members, who seek to gain a more comprehensive understanding of various practical questions, approach their subjects with methodological rigor that breaks common boundaries between research and practice.

In this issue, authors from five continents present evidence that cuts across an array of geographic settings and populations, including the Middle East, South America, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa. The first two research articles address the effects of conflict on education. In “War and Schooling in South Sudan, 2013-2016,” Augustino Ting Mayai takes an innovative approach to examining physical exposure to violence in an effort to understand the long-term effects of war on the accumulation of human capital. Mayai notes that, although previous research has focused on displacement and food insecurity, there has been little systematic collection of data that will provide a better understanding of how long-term conflict affects education and the accumulation of human capital. Taking advantage of the fact that exposure to violence varies across geographic locations, Mayai “estimate[s] the causal impact of the recent civil war on primary school enrollment as a proxy for measuring human capital accumulation” (p. 14). He finds that “schools located in the South Sudanese war zones lost 85 children per year on average, or 18.5 percent of total enrollment” (p. 14). He also finds that the decline in girls’ enrollment is unrelated to the conflict, which is perhaps surprising to outsiders. Mayai argues this is likely due to pre-existing social barriers, such as “gendered domestic roles, early marriage, and out-of-wedlock pregnancies” (p. 14) that have long blocked girls’ educational opportunities in South Sudan. He pays close attention to the policy implications of his research and, based on his findings, calls for a number of government interventions to improve schooling outcomes. His recommendations include support for creating

safe learning facilities, increased education funding for displaced South Sudanese children, preventing armed forces from occupying schools, and enforcing local and international child labor laws by confronting child soldiering. Because this article was among our “first views” for this issue, in August 2020, the government of South Sudan has already benefitted from Mayai’s findings and has even incorporated some of them into its revised education policies.

The next article, “How Cognitive and Psychosocial Difficulties Affect Learning Outcomes: A Study of Primary School Children in Syria” by Grace Anyaegbu, Caroline Carney, Holly-Jane Howell, Alaa Zaza, and Abdulkader Alaeddin, assesses the effects of conflict on children’s mental health and wellbeing and on their education outcomes. The authors collected data from a large sample of children (n=7,191) who received educational support combining “classroom lessons with remedial education, structured psychosocial support, and play-based activities” (p. 54) through the Manahel Program in northwestern Syria from November 2018 to May 2019. The data included children’s cognitive and psychosocial functioning levels and their literacy levels, as reported by their teachers. The authors find a clear and robust connection between cognitive and psychosocial difficulties and “poorer learning progress” (p. 50). Although others have found that psychosocial interventions with conflict-affected children can improve learning outcomes (Betancourt et al. 2014), the degree to which children’s learning suffers as a result of their cognitive and psychosocial difficulties has been less clear. Thus, these findings make an important contribution to the literature.

The next two articles offer compelling insights into interventions for conflict-affected learners in Lebanon and Colombia. First, “A Proof-of-Concept Study of Can’t Wait to Learn: A Digital Game-Based Learning Program for Out-of-School Children in Lebanon,” coauthored by Jasmine S. Turner, Karine Taha, Nisreen Ibrahim, Koen I. Neijenhuijs, Eyad Hallak, Kate Radford, Hester Stubbé-Alberts, Thomas de Hoop, Mark J. D. Jordans, and Felicity L. Brown, examines an education technology intervention in a humanitarian setting. The authors present a proof-of-concept study of Can’t Wait to Learn, a digital game-based learning program that “combines an experiential, active learning design with meaningful, competency-appropriate, and contextually relevant content” (p. 76). Employing proof-of-concept studies is important in being able to assess most accurately whether a program is likely to be effective enough to warrant investment. These studies also are useful in assessing how and to what extent a program may need to be modified or adapted to fit new circumstances. In this case, the authors assessed the feasibility of using Can’t Wait to Learn with out-of-

school children in Lebanon by “implementing its mathematics component in basic literacy and numeracy classes (n=30) with out-of-school children (n=390) ages 10-14” (p. 76). In addition to estimating changes in the children’s numeracy and psychosocial wellbeing, the authors conducted “focus group discussions (n=16) and key informant interviews (n=19) with children, facilitators, parents, and partner staff members to understand the lived experience, perceived impact, and implementation challenges of the program” (p. 76). The authors found dramatic results across a number of key indicators, including “significant improvements in numeracy, psychological symptoms, and self-esteem” (p. 76). This article provides a good example of a successful academic-practitioner partnership, which included War Child Holland and its partner education specialists. As the authors continue their efforts to determine conclusively if the program is effective, their findings will inform future studies.

In “The Role of Technical and Vocational Education in Social Reintegration: Insights from Colombian Ex-Combatants,” coauthors Maria Paulina Arango-Fernández and Stephanie Simmons Zuilkowski add a critical dimension to our understanding of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) for ex-combatants. The authors explore the “experiences and perceptions of the ex-combatants who participate in these programs” (p. 110). Although seminal research conducted in the late 1990s and early 2000s explicitly sought to understand former youth combatants in Uganda (Blattman and Annan 2008, 2010) and in Sierra Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein 2005), more recent research featuring ex-combatants’ voices has been scarce. Arango-Fernández and Zuilkowski argue that this lack has obscured whether these men and women find “access to TVET useful in building new social networks” (p. 110), which is a critical factor in preventing violence and promoting social cohesion. To address this gap, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with female and male ex-combatants from Medellín, Colombia, who were engaged in TVET in order to “examine their perceptions of whether and how TVET contributed to their social reintegration” (p. 110). The authors’ findings show that some forms of TVET provided transitional spaces in which a sense of normalcy could prevail and ex-combatants could interact with trusted mentors and educators. This created opportunities for their structured integration into civil society and the workforce and promoted psychosocial recovery and built social support. Other types of TVET, however, “reinforced [ex-combatants’] isolation and segregation” (p. 110), especially short-term programs that served only ex-combatants. Ex-combatants also reported struggling to reintegrate into society, in part because they felt stigmatized. The authors argue that, in order to enhance the success of future TVET programs, they should seek to “develop social bonds and trust between ex-combatants and their communities” (p. 110).

The next set of articles addresses problems inherent in the structure and organization of EiE programs and research. For their article, “Landscape Analysis of Early Childhood Development and Education in Emergencies,” Liliana Angélica Ponguta, Kathryn Moore, Divina Varghese, Sascha Hein, Angela Ng, Aseel Fawaz Alzaghoul, Maria Angélica Benavides Camacho, Karishma Sethi, and Majd Al-Soleiti set out to determine why early childhood development (ECD) programs still lag behind other EiE interventions. In their effort to understand this question, they collected survey and interview data from key stakeholders and conducted a large-scale review of the literature. They asked key stakeholders about (1) their perceptions of challenges to ECDEiE their organizations faced, (2) what opportunities may exist to overcome these barriers, and (3) which advocacy strategies may be most effective in increasing access to ECDEiE. To complement the surveys, the authors’ extensive literature review represents a mapping of the organizations working to support ECDEiE. Ponguta et al. examined “trends in the geographic focus, program models, and evidence of the implementation and impact of programs” in both published and gray literature. Their findings point to six focal areas that “drive strategic [ECDEiE] initiatives in national and global contexts: a greater focus on community needs and participation; systematization of evidence and strategic brokerage and communication; coherence between national and humanitarian aid agency mandates; a focus on workforce development and support; identification and promotion of ECDEiE as a priority area among key donors and funders; and capitalizing on and strengthening ECDEiE multisectoral partnerships” (p. 172). Like many of the findings reported in this issue, this review offers new resources for practitioners committed to gaining a better understanding of the global topography of ECD interventions, including the strengths, weaknesses, and remaining gaps.

The next article offers innovations in theory for what the author terms “smart radicals.” In “Learning to Become Smart Radicals: A Regenerative Lens on the Potential for Peace and Reconciliation through Youth and Education Systems,” Mieke T. A. Lopes Cardozo offers a new model that builds on her earlier efforts to understand youth and peacebuilding. In the midst of the ongoing media and policy focus on youth as a population that presents risks and initiates violence, and on recent responses that aim to mitigate this perception, such as the UN Global Study on Youth, Peace, and Security (Simpson 2018), Lopes Cardozo takes up the challenge of examining the potential of education to support peacebuilding among youth. She offers a new perspective as she explores how a regenerative approach can help the EiE field “rethink and reshape education to prepare younger generations to respond more effectively to peacebuilding and to the related ‘wicked challenges’” (p. 190). Lopes Cardozo builds on existing conceptual frameworks

(Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017; Tomaševski 2005) to “encourage a deeper understanding of education’s transgressive potential to inspire alternative, reconciliatory paths toward peacebuilding” (p. 187). Readers likely will be struck by Lopes Cardozo’s provocative approach to these ideas. She elicits—even demands—the reader’s participation in her effort to “inspire the development of ‘smartly radical’ questions; to support research, policy, and practice design that is more critically informed and consciousness driven; and, finally, to support the transformative potential of education systems and stakeholders to serve younger generations more effectively and enable them to respond to ‘glocal’ challenges in ways that are mindful, conscious, and effective” (p. 187-88). This article represents a step toward the reform of knowledge creation and production that many scholars and practitioners are discussing today, and that *JEiE* supports.

Our research article section concludes with “Beyond Numbers: The Use and Usefulness of Data for Education in Emergencies” by Elizabeth Buckner, Daniel Shephard, and Anne Smiley. They note complexities within the EiE data ecosystem that many of our readers, including scholars, practitioners, and policymakers, have experienced firsthand. In this article, the authors seek to understand and systematically categorize “how EiE professionals use data and what makes data ‘useful’” (p. 214). To accomplish this aim, these scholars had to first clarify and understand the dimensions of the task. From extensive in-depth, qualitative interviews with 48 professionals who are working across humanitarian, development, and stabilization efforts, the authors identify “six primary ways EiE actors use data” (p. 235): planning, coordinating, monitoring, evaluating, advocating, and policymaking. Among their respondents, they find a bifurcation in the way national/local and international actors speak about and use data. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those working at a national or local level “spoke the most about operational uses of data and the least about strategic uses, such as policymaking and advocating” (p. 214). Actors with a global purview, often those working in the headquarters of international nongovernmental organizations, multilateral agencies, or UN agencies, spoke more frequently about “strengthening data systems and . . . strategic uses” for data (p. 214). Importantly, the authors identify and problematize the many “nontechnical factors that shaped participants’ perceptions” of data availability and usefulness, particularly the “politicization of data, users’ expertise in analysis, and personal and institutional relationships” (p. 214), issues that concern *JEiE* readers writ large. Recognizing the weight of these nontechnical factors, Buckner et al. argue that efforts to improve the data on EiE must not ignore challenges related to people, institutions, and contexts and instead acknowledge their centrality in supporting or obstructing access to information.

Our field notes section begins with Maryam Jillani’s description of “Community-Led Provision of Nonformal Education for Displaced Learners in Northern Nigeria.” Jillani explores a “community coalition model” designed by Creative Associates International and its partners to provide “provide nonformal education to out-of-school displaced children and youth in northern Nigeria” (p. 243). The available evidence demonstrating a clear cause-and-effect relationship between enhanced community involvement and improved education outcomes in crisis- and conflict-affected contexts is scant. However, anecdotal evidence from northern Nigeria indicates that “vertical cohesion”—for example, collaboration between state authorities and local communities—prompted investment in school infrastructure and the formalization of a nonformal education site, thus mandating that a formally trained teacher be employed at the site (p. 257). Descriptive data collected by Creative Associates International show how this community mobilization and capacity-building approach works. Jillani draws from the project’s monitoring and evaluation data to show that the program provides education access for more than 80,000 learners in this volatile region.

Our next field note, “Embedding Social and Emotional Learning in Literacy and Teacher Training in Afghanistan” by Susan Ayari, Agatha J. van Ginkel, Janet Shriberg, Benjamin Gauley, and Sarah Maniates, similarly describes key elements of an innovative EiE intervention, in this case a program that illustrates possibilities for supporting social and emotional learning (SEL) in literacy and teacher training. The authors seek to enhance understanding of the challenges of supporting SEL in EiE, with a particular focus on “embedding social and emotional skills into literacy learning in the early grades of primary school” (p. 262). The authors note the importance of examining a program like this in Afghanistan, where “many children and their teachers have been exposed repeatedly to adversity and highly stressful situations,” including, for example, attacks on schools (p. 262). Given the effects these experiences have on students’ and teachers’ learning and wellbeing, this article describes the benefits of approaching these challenges by embedding SEL in the “early grade literacy curriculum and teacher training in Afghanistan, and in education support systems and practices” (p. 262). Preliminary data suggest that this approach can have a promising effect on teachers and students. The authors call for further research to understand more fully the effects of embedding SEL practices in early grade reading materials, classrooms, and teacher training, in Afghanistan and beyond.

This issue also features an interview commentary, “Fishing in the Desert: Empowering Sustainable Development through Higher Education in Kakuma Refugee Camp,” in which Paul O’Keeffe interviews Dieu Merci Luundo, founder of Vijana Twaweza Youth Club (VTC). VTC won *Permaculture* magazine’s 2020 Youth in Permaculture Prize and the 2021 UN World Food Programme NextGen East African Innovator Programme competition. O’Keeffe and Luundo’s discussion highlights the role higher education played in enabling refugees to implement their own initiatives to support the needs of their communities. Luundo describes how higher education programming in Kakuma inspired both the development of VTC and the way the club works across communities within the camp—Congolese, South Sudanese, Somalis—“to provide better nutrition to Kakuma residents and to help combat some of the effects [of] climate change” (p 278).

Our book review section features two books that follow the journeys of refugees from conflict-affected settings in sub-Saharan Africa, to refugee camps, to a new life in the United States. Kelsey A. Dalrymple’s review of *Making Refuge: Somali Bantu Refugees and Lewiston, Maine*, by anthropologist Catherine Besteman, describes a seven-year ethnographic study that focused on the journey of Somali Bantu refugees, a marginalized ethnic group in Somalia. Education is a recurring theme as the refugees make their way to camps in Kenya, and eventually to resettlement in Lewiston, Maine. Dalrymple notes that the book demonstrates the central role schooling can play in shaping the past, present, and future of refugees’ personal and cultural identities, including integration and the discrimination they face in education contexts.

Finally, Elisabeth King reviews *Those We Throw Away Are Diamonds: A Refugee’s Search for Home* by Mondiant Dogon (with Jenna Krajeski). The book traces Dogon’s life, from his early childhood in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to two decades in refugee camps in Rwanda, and then to New York City, where he earned a master’s degree in international education. Here, too, education is central to the book—and to Dogon’s journey, as it provided a vital source of hope for the future. King emphasizes the power of Dogon’s story to challenge common misconceptions about displacement and refugees, and to remind us of the important work that the field of EiE still requires.

We are encouraged by the tremendous progress and innovative approaches to EiE that the articles in this issue, and in *JEiE* in general, represent. And yet, we are aware that there is much more work to be done. With the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and their subsequent banning of secondary education for girls, the multiplying climate catastrophes, the rippling effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,

and Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine, we are in an era of global crises that involve interstate war, displacement, and learning losses unlike anything the world has seen since World War II. It is our ardent hope that the knowledge offered in these pages will inform future EiE response for the scores of learners whose lives and education are being disrupted by new and ongoing global crises, and that it will push the field forward toward more and better research and evidence-based policy, programming, and practice.

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