
Book Review: *Schooling for Refugee Children: A Social Justice Perspective Informed by Children from Syria* by Eleanore Hargreaves, Brian Lally, Bassel Akar, Jumana Al-Waeli, and Jasmine Costello

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BOOK REVIEW

***SCHOOLING FOR REFUGEE CHILDREN: A SOCIAL JUSTICE
PERSPECTIVE INFORMED BY CHILDREN FROM SYRIA***
**BY ELEANORE HARGREAVES, BRIAN LALLY, BASSEL AKAR,
JUMANA AL-WAELI, AND JASMINE COSTELLO**
UCL PRESS, 2024. XVII + 158 PAGES
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The field of education in emergencies (EiE) has focused increasingly on understanding and advancing social justice in and through education (Novelli, Lopes Cardozo, and Smith 2017; Pherali and Magee 2019). This conceptual shift has moved the field from a focus on access to education to more complex explorations of educational equity and quality within “context- and culture-specific circumstances” (p. 2). In *Schooling for Refugee Children: A Social Justice Perspective Informed by Children from Syria*, Eleanore Hargreaves, Brian Lally, Bassel Akar, Jumana Al-Waeli, and Jasmine Costello build on this tradition by presenting the central premise that all children have the right to a socially just education. The book draws on the voices of displaced Syrian children in formal and non-formal schooling to illustrate their experiences of social justice in education (and lack thereof), thereby demonstrating the value of rich, qualitative data for informing policymaking, programming, and funding for EiE.

Schooling for Refugee Children includes case studies of displaced Syrian children’s experiences in three different schooling contexts, two in Lebanon and one in England. The first case study focuses on children and teachers from Multi Aid Programs, a non-formal education (NFE) program in Lebanon run by Syrians for Syrians. The authors conducted participatory research activities with the children over three days, including drawing pictures of themselves in the future and writing letters to teachers to learn about the children’s life histories and learning experiences. The second case study takes place at Relief and Reconciliation for Syria, a Lebanese NFE program offered to Syrian children during the compounded crises of political uprising and COVID-19. The authors collected testimonials from Syrian and Lebanese teachers and conducted classroom observations. The third case study focuses on six Syrian children resettled in England, where they attended an Inner London school. Data was generated over nine months through biweekly meetings with the students, both collectively and individually. Through each project, the authors employed participatory research methods that offered participants opportunities to “share their stories and represent their different educational experiences” (p. 2). Doing so enabled the children to exercise their right to representation in education, a key component of social justice, while also creating space for the authors to investigate how the students experienced social justice.

To facilitate their analysis, Hargreaves et al. bring together Fraser's (2008) theory of social justice with Kohli's (2011) theory of safety, belonging, and success. The authors emphasize social justice as representation in education that considers "the children's expressions of ideas, opinions and preferences as representations." They assert that, to achieve social justice, the children's representations must be "given due consideration and acted upon as appropriate by adults" (p. 18). Hargreaves et al. also highlight Kohli's (2011) theory that safety, belonging, and success are core needs for refugee and asylum-seeking children. The authors emphasize that "the children's need for safety, for belonging and for success may be met" (p. 21) only when social justice is present. Similarly, children are able to represent their needs and views appropriately only when they feel a sense of safety and belonging. The authors thus demonstrate that striving for social justice in EiE is not an add-on but an essential element in facilitating access to high-quality education.

Unsurprisingly, access to social justice varied across the three cases. While Syrian children face structural exclusion from public schools in Lebanon, the shared refugee experiences between teachers and students in the Multi Aid Program fostered a sense of safety and belonging that enabled the children to succeed in their education and enhanced their access to social justice. Conversely, at Relief and Reconciliation for Syria, the rigid pedagogical style that prioritized memorization and repetition negatively affected the children's academic, personal, and emotional growth, which in turn limited their opportunities to access social justice. Although Syrian students attending the Inner London school had greater legal inclusion in the public school system, they experienced a lack of safety and recognition in their schools, which indicates a limited access to social justice. These comparisons underpin the authors' call for a pedagogical transformation to advance social justice in refugee education that would include a shift in power dynamics between students and teachers and "empower learners as critical thinkers, creative innovators and problem solvers" (p. 148). Doing so would create opportunities for increased representation of refugee children, foster greater recognition of students' value, and contribute to students' sense of safety and belonging in the classroom and the community.

Schooling for Refugee Children makes theoretical and methodological contributions to the field of EiE and to refugee education. By integrating refugee experiences in contexts of asylum and resettlement in a single monograph, the authors challenge the dominant scholarly landscape that keeps these two worlds separate. Uniting them reminds readers that the challenges of being a refugee do not end simply by crossing certain borders; a refugee child's search for normalcy, safety, and belonging continues once they are resettled, and a pathway to citizenship does not guarantee social justice in the child's schooling system or daily experiences. By providing substantial detail about their participatory research design, the authors provide valuable guidance for scholars or students seeking to emulate such approaches in their own research.

While the authors recommend ways to improve the practices of educators, school leaders, and teacher trainers, they give limited attention to the systemic transformations needed to sustain meaningful change. This gap is particularly significant in the context of NFE, which often emerges as an alternative method of schooling in refugee and other emergency situations precisely because of the systemic injustices that exclude students from the formal education system. Although the authors provide meaningful recommendations for how to increase student representation and social justice at the school level, they do not address how policymakers might approach the structural barriers and systemic exclusions that give rise to the need for NFE in the first place.

Schooling for Refugee Children provides meaningful insights into the educational experiences of Syrian children and serves as a valuable resource for scholars, educators, and policymakers. The authors' careful attention to the children's own schooling narratives, which they analyzed through the lens of social justice and belonging, underscores the importance of centering refugee voices in research and practice. This sheds light on the importance of qualitative data for the EiE ecosystem, including robust details on how researchers might approach such data collection. Through rich narratives and in-depth analysis, the authors highlight structural and pedagogical barriers to achieving social justice in contexts of both asylum and resettlement, and offer concrete ways to reimagine refugee education in ways that affirm safety, belonging, and meaningful participation.

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