

BOOK REVIEWS

Refugee and Immigrant Students: Achieving Equity in Education by Florence E. McCarthy & Margaret H. Vickers

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This book simultaneously addresses some existing gaps in educational systems in locations currently home to immigrants and refugees. Furthermore it suggests an alternative way of viewing this population. The book proves to be both a great resource as well as a challenge.

Since research has been conducted on various educational issues relating to immigrants around the world, this work emphasizes the complexities involved in providing refugee students in particular with the education they deserve. The contributing authors are each involved in some aspect of refugee and immigrant educational research, and they represent the countries of Australia, Canada, India, Uganda, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The authors of each chapter possess a wealth of knowledge and experience in their fields, with many focusing their research on specific vulnerable populations across the globe.

This book would be helpful for educators of refugee and immigrant students, as well as community leaders involved with immigrant populations. The programs and strategies suggested in the book for including refugee students in classroom communities, addressing their needs and building on their strengths, and collaborating with other community stakeholders, are both insightful and proven effective in many cases.

The editors begin the book by clarifying the difference between “immigrants” and “refugees,” and they provide background information regarding the current worldwide refugee situation. Along with each of the contributors, they present refugee students as possessing various strengths, resulting from their cultures and experiences, which can be positively contributed to in classroom communities. Throughout the book, more than thirteen refugee and immigrant populations are discussed, as well as the unique factors surrounding each group’s educational possibilities and difficulties. The book is divided into three sections, including

implementing pedagogical initiatives, building school-community partnerships, and addressing systemic issues and policies.

In multiple chapters, the book addresses the fact that when refugee and immigrant students arrive in new countries or locations, they may have little or no previous formal education, or experienced severely interrupted education. In the first section, Karen Dooley suggests using “smart links” and “smart paths” to connect students’ current knowledge and understandings to new information. She also explains the importance of providing meaningful opportunities for students to make connections and of promoting intellectual participation among all students in the classroom. This section describes an intercultural education program in which all cultures are validated and parental and community involvement is valued. While refugee and immigrant students are often viewed as victims of their experiences, the book provides examples of how students’ various experiences can produce in them great strengths which can result in valuable contributions to their schools and communities.

Not only are most refugee students typically behind their peers in content knowledge, they also possess other unique non-academic needs as well. This book calls for addressing the needs of refugee and immigrant students in a holistic manner, yet also acknowledges the confusion and lack of clarity that often exists regarding which stakeholders are responsible for meeting various needs. Several studies described in the book suggest that collaboration among stakeholders is necessary to prevent the needs of refugee and immigrant students going unmet. It suggests that although responsibilities are distributed across the federal, state, and local levels, working together and forming partnerships is most effective.

The book also addresses the lack of educational policies in place that ensure an equitable education for students of refugee or immigrant backgrounds. The specific examples provided of effective programs shine a light on the fact that “achieving equity in education” for immigrant students can be a reality. Just as the book’s contributors emphasize the importance of changing the way educators view refugee and immigrant students, they also suggest altering the way educational policies and programs are viewed and considered as well. This idea of looking at the education of refugees and immigrants through a critical lens by adapting systems already in place and implementing new programs is consistent throughout the book.

The many case studies described in the book offer a broader view of immigrant and refugee education than that of simply the task of meeting students’ academic needs. Students are viewed as powerful sources of knowledge and various skills, rather than as victims of their experiences or the focus of deficit discourse. Though the case study descriptions and details are slower by nature, the results of the studies are eye-opening and encouraging. Anyone interested in learning about educational systems around the world for some of the most vulnerable populations or seeking innovative ways for providing such students with the tools and support

they need, would find this book both useful and thought-provoking. Rather than simply diagnosing the issues involved in immigrant education, the book chooses an alternative direction in seeking to discover how to best meet immigrant and refugee students' needs in effective and empowering ways. This will hopefully inspire those who read it to be change agents as well.

Reviewer details

Elizabeth Mallory is a graduate of the University of North Georgia and holds a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood/Special Education. Her interests involve developing and enacting justice-oriented pedagogies which provide a platform of learning for all students including students with refugee status. Contact email: lillian4721@gmail.com



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