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PREPARING TEACHERS TO WORK WITH REFUGEE-BACKGROUND STUDENTS: TEACHER EDUCATOR ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract

Working effectively with refugee-background students requires an understanding of their personal, educational, linguistic, cultural, and migration backgrounds in order to meet their learning and psychosocial needs. In other words, teachers need to be equipped with awareness, strategies and tools that can help support learning and adaptation. This paper describes an action research (Carr & Kemmis, 2005) project in which the authors incorporated a focus on the needs of refugee-background students into an asynchronous, online graduate-level teacher education course for current or future teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The primary goal of this study was to foster educators' awareness of the typical backgrounds of refugee-background students by sharing some useful research, professional development resources, and instructional tools addressing the unique needs of this population. The paper describes the learning experiences incorporated into the course and reports the graduate students' reflections on the content and its relevance to their present and future teaching contexts.

There are currently an unprecedented 26 million refugees worldwide recognized by the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), with millions more internally displaced or seeking asylum (UNHCR, 2019a). As a result, growing numbers of refugee-

background students are arriving in classrooms around the world. Due to the difficulties they face during conflict and displacement, many have experienced interrupted schooling and psychosocial challenges, which can impact how they learn and adapt to the school environment (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; McBrien, Dooley, & Birman, 2017). Educators need to become familiar with the personal, linguistic, cultural, and migration backgrounds of these learners to understand the unique challenges they may experience in the classroom as well as the practical knowledge, proficiency in multiple languages, resourcefulness, and adaptability they possess (Shapiro & MacDonald, 2017). In many cases, educators may not know which students in their classes come from refugee backgrounds, as this information is not always shared with teachers, but all educators – second language teachers in particular – should be equipped with awareness, strategies, and tools to support these learners.

This paper describes an action research project in which the authors incorporated a focus on the needs of refugee students into an asynchronous, online graduate-level teacher education course for current or future teachers of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The primary goal in this study was to foster awareness of typical experiences of refugee-background students by sharing some useful research, professional development resources, and instructional tools addressing the unique needs of this population. While most graduate students in the course were current or future teachers of children and youth with varied migration backgrounds, the broad aim was to cultivate teacher candidates' dispositions for and confidence in working with refugee-background students across the lifespan. In the following section, a brief review of current literature about refugee-background students' identities and experiences sets the context for the study.

Literature Review

Globally, more than half of refugees have fled conflict in just three countries, Syria, Afghanistan, and South Sudan (UNHCR, 2019a), but they represent numerous ethnic identities, religions, and languages. In the United States, the majority of recent asylum seekers are from Central America, led by Venezuela, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Mexico, and speak Spanish and/or a variety of indigenous languages

(DHS, 2019). Across these diverse cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities, refugee-background students experience two primary types of barriers: interrupted education and psychosocial challenges (Dryden-Peterson, 2016; Shapiro, 2018).

Interrupted Education

Many refugees experience interrupted formal schooling due to conflict in their countries of origin or protracted displacement; in fact, out of the 7.1 million refugee children in the world today, more than half are out of school (UNHCR, 2019b). Access to formal schooling becomes more difficult as students grow older, with 63% of elementary-age refugee children enrolled in school (compared to 91% of children globally) but only 24% of refugee youth enrolled in secondary school (84% globally) (UNHCR, 2019b). Proficiency in the language of instruction, economic barriers, safety concerns, cultural differences, discrimination, host nation policies, and capacity limitations impede access to school for many refugee students in displacement settings (Aydin & Kaya, 2017; Dryden-Peterson, 2012).

The capacity to provide access to formal schooling is a serious concern in the nations hosting the majority of the world's refugees (UNHCR, 2019a). Many host countries, including Pakistan and Uganda, have made progress in including refugee students in the national schooling system, but numerous challenges remain, particularly helping these students learn the language of instruction, catch up on missed years of schooling, and overcome psychosocial effects of displacement (Hos, 2020; UNHCR, 2019b). In other cases, like that of Turkey during the early years of the Syrian civil war, parallel systems are established to educate students in their mother tongue using the home country's curriculum to prepare for repatriation that may never occur (Tezel McCarthy, 2018). Other host countries, like Bangladesh, exclude refugee students from national schooling systems, so the only option is non-formal education provided in refugee camps or settlements by NGOs or community initiatives (UNHCR, 2019b). As a result, refugee students may have gaps in formal schooling and background knowledge, literacy, and academic skills and may not have proficiency in the language of instruction (Hos, 2020).

The financial strain of displacement also limits refugee students' schooling. Even where schooling is tuition-free, mandatory fees for books and supplies, uniforms, and transportation can exceed family

resources (UNHCR, 2019b). In addition, students often must contribute to the family by working or taking on household tasks (Erden, 2019; UNHCR, 2019b). In some cases, refugee girls are married early in order to reduce the family's economic burden and in hopes that they will be better provided for; this often means the end of a girl's education, as returning to school after marriage is rare (Bartolomei, Eckert, & Pittaway, 2014; Canefe, 2018; UNHCR, 2018).

Psychosocial Challenges

In addition to these logistical barriers, refugee-background students often face psychosocial challenges which can affect their adaptation and progress in school (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). Particularly for children, experiences of conflict or persecution can have deep psychological effects, as can harsh conditions and family separation during displacement and difficult cultural adjustment or discrimination in the displacement or resettlement context (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). This stress and trauma can affect students' behavior, learning, and overall wellbeing (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018). For example, students who have experienced conflict display higher rates of anxiety, lower academic performance, and more behavioral difficulties than those who have not (Patel et al., 2017). Students suffering from traumatic stress may withdraw or act out and may display signs of depression, hyper-arousal, impaired memory and attention, or avoidance behavior (Schmidt, 2018). It is crucial for educators to be prepared to identify these psychosocial difficulties and support the development of healthy coping strategies and resilience through trauma-informed pedagogy and referrals to appropriate service providers (Pucino, 2018; Schmidt, 2018; Sullivan & Simonson, 2016).

Teacher Education

Teachers serving refugee-background students need to be aware of these typical educational and psychosocial challenges (Anders, 2012; Shapiro, 2018). Recent research has documented the efforts of teachers, schools, and school districts to meet the distinct needs of resettled refugee students through, for example, holistic wrap-around services for newcomer immigrant and refugee youth (Bajaj & Suresh, 2018), academic and extracurricular support to bolster refugee students' adjustment (Mendenhall & Bartlett, 2018), and a critical

literacy framework to enhance language instruction for elementary Somali Bantu refugee students (Roy, 2017). Educators play a significant role in creating ways to meaningfully connect communities, schools, and refugees to foster adaptation (Duran, 2020).

This current research speaks volumes about the urgency of supporting educators at all levels in meeting the psychosocial and academic needs of refugee students. Teacher preparation programs must consider meaningful ways to include attention to refugee students' and families' stories; however, little attention has been given to addressing this reality in teacher education and professional development (Ficarra, 2017; Anders, 2012). For instance, based on research about the intersectional barriers of language, racialization, discrimination, and Islamophobia Somali refugee youth in Minnesota schools and communities experience, Bigelow (2010) argues for educators to learn about the educational and social lives of refugees. Gagné, Schmidt, and Markus (2017) suggest that opportunities to engage in critically oriented tasks supported teacher education students in Canada in recognizing and responding to refugee students' needs through culturally responsive pedagogy. Clearly, teacher educators have a critical responsibility to ensure that preservice and in-service teachers are prepared to work effectively with refugee students and families. This paper describes one US teacher educator's attempt to better prepare teacher candidates to understand and meet the needs of refugee-background students.

Method

This study took an action research (AR) approach (Carr & Kemmis, 2005), a cyclical, reflective method intended to devise and implement practical solutions for real-world problems that is frequently employed by teachers to improve their practice. The second author, Dr. Kathleen Ramos, is a teacher educator at a large state university in the eastern US who teaches preservice and in-service teachers enrolled in a master's in curriculum and instruction program in the ESOL concentration. In this AR project, she sought to shift her instructional practices to better prepare her graduate students to teach for global competence (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), focusing specifically on fostering awareness and introducing pedagogical strategies for inclusive teaching of refugee-background students.

Study Context

Kathleen was selected as a Longview Foundation Global Teacher Education Fellow for the 2018-2019 academic year, during which she had the opportunity to redesign an existing course to incorporate global learning outcomes, pedagogical strategies, content, assessments, and technology. Because of her previous experience teaching refugee-background students at the secondary level, Kathleen decided to focus the modifications on strengthening teachers' preparedness and commitment for inclusive teaching of this population. She selected a teacher education course designed to introduce graduate students to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, which she taught as an online, asynchronous class in both the fall 2018 and spring 2019 semesters. The central research question was: in what ways may learning experiences embedded in an online, asynchronous teacher education graduate course affect in-service teachers' and teacher candidates' knowledge, dispositions, and skills around teaching for global competence in PK-12 (primary and secondary) schools?

In the fall of 2018, Kathleen revised a portion of the course to incorporate the Teaching for Global Competence (TfGC) framework¹ (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), which seeks to aid teachers in fostering learners' knowledge, skills, and inspiration to address issues of global significance in their local communities and beyond. The TfGC framework comprises four domains: practicing an inquiry stance, considering multiple perspectives, engaging in respectful dialogue, and taking appropriate, responsible action. Consistent with teacher AR, Kathleen sought to model these aspects in her own teaching by introducing resources, learning activities, and assessments structured to foster awareness among her graduate students about the experiences of refugee-background students. In other words, she designed the modules to exemplify learning activities that the graduate students could adapt for their future classrooms to help students develop global competence.

As the AR method takes a cyclical approach, Kathleen repeated the process in the following semester with adjustments based on her observations from the first iteration. For this second iteration in spring 2019, Kathleen invited the first author, Melissa Hauber-Özer, to co-

¹ Developed by the Asia Society Center for Global Education in partnership with the OECD.

teach the course to fulfill an internship requirement for the PhD program and to gain experience in teacher education. Melissa assisted in incorporating an even stronger focus on common learning needs and valuable instructional practices and resources for refugee-background students. This paper focuses on the outcomes of the spring 2019 iteration because of this more in-depth engagement with the topic of interest.

Course Overview

The course was delivered via the Blackboard learning management system. The core texts (Banks & Banks, 2016; Cushner, McClelland & Safford, 2015) were supplemented by a variety of journal articles and web-based materials, including news articles, videos, photos, and padlets (online bulletin boards for collaboratively displaying information, pictures, and links). Graduate students participated in weekly online discussions of the module material, fulfilled 20 hours of field experience in a local school or out-of-school program, and completed two performance-based assessment projects.

The course followed a 15-week semester format, split into thematic weekly modules. The first six weeks introduced graduate students to critical multicultural education and guided them in considering how their students' cultural, linguistic, religious, racial, and ethnic identities may impact their educational experiences, including critical perspectives on equity issues in US schooling. The next five weeks focused on pedagogical strategies and tools for more equitably addressing refugee-background students' identities and experiences, rooted in TfGC (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018). During the final four weeks, the graduate students examined equity issues related to gender, sexual orientation, and ability and applied their learning in a culminating course project.

Participants

There were a total of 46 graduate students enrolled in the course during the two semesters of the project, which included both pre-service and in-service teachers working or planning to work in schools across the local region of the US as well as internationally. Most took the course as requirement for the master's degree in curriculum and instruction with ESOL certification, although a handful planned to teach world languages or become literacy specialists. Prior to beginning

the modules focused on TfGC (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; OECD/Asia Society, 2018), all graduate students enrolled in the course during these semesters were invited to participate in the study. Kathleen's graduate research assistant sent a recruitment email, gathered participant data, and maintained confidentiality during the course to alleviate concerns about participation affecting their grades.²

Nine graduate students provided informed consent: four in fall 2018 and five in spring 2019; as mentioned above, this paper focuses on the data from the second iteration of the course. Four participants in spring 2019 identified as White females and one as an Asian female. Three were native English speakers, and two were immigrants to the US, one from South Korea and one from Macedonia, who both spoke English as an additional language (see Table 1).

Table 1
Participant Information

Pseudonym	Background
Ashley	Had lived in Russia and Kazakhstan, bilingual in Russian; had volunteered as an ESOL teacher, currently working as a program coordinator for an adult ESL program in the Mid-Atlantic US
Carly	Married to a Colombian immigrant and bilingual in Spanish; currently teaching adult ESOL in the Mid-Atlantic U.S, including refugee-background students and seeking MA with licensure to teach ESOL in primary/secondary grades.
Katie	From Macedonia, married to a US citizen, and multilingual in several European languages; had taught second grade in an international school in Macedonia before moving to the US for her graduate studies.
Lisa	Had worked for the US state department before changing careers; currently teaching in a local public school in the Mid-Atlantic U.S; had experience working with resettled refugees in the US
So-Hyun	Immigrated as an adult from South Korea and married to a US citizen; pursuing an MA with licensure for Korean language; planned to become a Korean-English immersion program specialist; experience with other immigrant families and students.

² Those who did not participate were not asked for their reasons, and all students completed the same tasks in each module. In this paper, the term *graduate students* refers to all students enrolled in the course while *participants* refers to those consenting to have their work collected as data. All participant names are pseudonyms.

Data Collection and Analysis

Kathleen's graduate research assistant collected participants' discussion board posts and ungraded assignments until analysis could take place after Kathleen posted final course grades. Participants' questionnaire responses, discussion board posts, and assignments were analyzed using open coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Authors 1 and 2, along with Kathleen's graduate research assistant, looked specifically for responses in the data related to participants' knowledge, dispositions, and skills for TfGC around the issue of inclusion of refugee-background students.

Researcher Positionality

Melissa is a PhD candidate in international education at the university where Kathleen teaches; she has a background in teaching ESOL and literacy to adult learners in both community and university settings in the United States. She now conducts research on language learning and educational access for refugees in Turkey and plans to become a teacher educator. Before becoming a teacher educator, Kathleen was an experienced teacher of Spanish and ESOL at the secondary level, working with many adolescent refugees in that capacity. Because of their professional backgrounds, both authors identify as strong advocates for refugee and immigrant learners.

Findings

As the focus of this paper is on participants' learning through the instructional tools and learning experiences incorporated in the course for the AR project, the findings are presented following brief descriptions of the pedagogical strategies and resources employed³. This approach is meant to aid our own reflection as (future) teacher educators and to encourage readers to consider the types of learning activities they could incorporate into their own teaching.

Texts and Discussion Board

The graduate students began the modules focused on TfGC by reading core texts for building their awareness and competences (e.g., Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016;

³ An etic thematic approach has been taken in a separate paper (Ramos et al., 2020) to examine the data using the domains of the TfGC framework as a priori themes.

OECD/Asia Society, 2018). In preparation for each of the following weekly modules, the graduate students also selected from a variety of supplementary journal articles (3-5 each week) focused on common instructional needs of refugee students and useful strategies (e.g., Dryden-Peterson, 2017; Montero, Newmaster, & Ledger, 2014; Benseman, 2014). Together, these texts aimed to spark students' thinking about what TfGC is, why it matters, and how they might incorporate it in their current or future teaching contexts. During each weekly module, the graduate students wrote brief, reflective posts and interacted with classmates on the course discussion board, thinking critically about, responding to, and applying the concepts from the readings to their current or anticipated teaching contexts.

Global Thinking Routines

During each weekly module focused on the needs of refugee-background students, the graduate students also tried out Global Thinking Routines (GTRs), experiential learning tools designed to foster global awareness and competences across content areas (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013; Boix Mansilla et al., 2017). Each GTR began with a provocation, such as a photograph or news story selected to prompt thinking and curiosity about the topic, followed by a series of questions, readings, online resources, and writing tasks to fill in gaps, challenge preconceptions, and provide an opportunity for application. Graduate students shared their completed GTR worksheets on the course discussion boards and responded to their classmates' work. Participants' assignments and comments were gathered as data. The goal was to model instructional strategies that graduate students could use with their own students in the future.

During the second week of the modules focused on TfGC, the graduate students tried two GTRs. The first, "The 3Ys," guided students through a series of materials and three reflective questions ("3Ys" refers to these "why" questions) to consider forced migration in the US context. Students were offered a choice of two topics from US history, a) the forced repatriation of Mexican American families in the 1930's and b) the internment of Japanese American families in relocation camps during World War II. The provocation for each topic included photographs, articles, and videos providing an overview of the policy and impact on individuals. Graduate students then

responded to the three "Y" (why) questions (listed below) and posted their responses in a discussion board.

1. Why might this topic matter to me?
2. Why might it matter to people around me (family, friends, city, nation)?
3. Why might it matter to the world?

In their posts, several participants expressed concern about current trends towards policies targeting minority groups such as Muslims and undocumented immigrants in the US, Uyghurs in China, and LGBTQ individuals in Brazil. They felt that this GTR would be a good way to foster awareness, critical thinking, perspective taking, and difficult conversations about these kinds of global issues of injustice among their own students. Like other participants, Carly expressed her belief that students must learn about historical injustices and "take action to prevent them by advocating for those who are most vulnerable" (3Ys attachment, 3/29/2019). Lisa stated her conviction that it is important to familiarize students with these shameful events of the past because "It could happen again" (3Ys attachment, 3/30/2019).

The second GTR in week 10, called "Step-in, Step-out, Step-back" (Boix Mansilla et al., 2017), also offered a choice between two news articles examining personal impact of global migration movements and policies. One story reported on a mixed-immigration status family (undocumented parents and citizen children) in the US living in fear of deportation⁴; the other described experiences of asylum seekers in Norway. After viewing a photograph and caption from the chosen news article, graduate students practiced perspective-taking and question generation using the following prompts:

1. Step-in: Given what you see and know at this time, what do you think this person might experience, feel, believe, or know?
2. Step-out: What else would you like (or need) to learn in order to understand this person's perspective better?

Then graduate students read the article and completed the process by reflecting on their own perspectives:

3. Step-back: Given your exploration of this perspective so far, what do you notice about your own perspective and what it takes to take somebody else's?

⁴ Although different in migration status from refugees, many undocumented immigrants in the US experience significant challenges; for this reason, Kathleen decided to include the topic.

Participants found this GTR a simple but powerful process to “reflect on your own biases and misunderstandings” (Lisa, discussion board post, 3/31/2019), “lead students down a path that pushes them to consider diverse human experiences with empathy” (Ashley, discussion board post, 3/30/2019), and stimulate the development of “intercultural sophistication and sensitivity to others’ experiences” (Katie, discussion board post, 3/29/2019).

Specifically related to the project focus, Carly reflected that this GTR could help teachers to understand the stress and uncertainty that their refugee-background students might have experienced and how this might affect their behavior and “cognitive and emotional well-being” (Step-in, Step-out, Step-back attachment, 3/29/2019). So-Hyun shared:

I believe it is essential for people to consider refugees’ perspectives in order to make them feel welcome and provide safe environments for them to settle... I think it is important for us to listen to their stories and to gain more in-depth understanding of their perspectives to make them feel safe and welcome in a new country. The article and picture about refugees in Norway gave me insights into how the world can remove prejudice and judgments while building compassion toward refugees to preserve their safety and support for their new opportunities and possibilities in a new country. (Step-in, Step-out, Step-back attachment, 3/31/2019).

This GTR seemed to prompt deep reflection and inspire ideas about potential use in participants’ future classrooms.

The next weekly module included two more GTRs (Boix Mansilla et al., 2017). The first, “Beauty and Truth,” was designed to stimulate critical thinking, perspective taking, and global awareness, this time focusing on the backgrounds and needs of refugee students. After viewing three photographs of smiling Syrian children in a refugee camp, the graduate students responded to the following questions:

1. Can you find beauty in these images?
2. Can you find truth in these images?

Then, they read a series of short news stories and watched videos detailing the challenges that many Syrian refugees endure. The graduate students responded to the following questions in writing to reflect on what they had read:

1. How might beauty reveal truth?
2. How might beauty conceal truth?

They also viewed a padlet that Kathleen had created titled “Reading the World of Refugees,” which displayed books about refugees for different ages. To apply their learning, the graduate students shared ideas on the discussion board for using this GTR with their future students, contextualizing the topic, provocation, and content related to their current or anticipated teaching contexts, grades, and subject areas.

Participants reported finding this activity powerful for taking perspectives and fostering empathy and critical thinking as well as being adaptable for various issues and content areas and with students across grade levels. Ashley wrote that the photographs helped her recognize both the human dignity and resilience of refugees and the “very real consequences” of displacement (Beauty and Truth attachment, 4/6/2019). So-Hyun stated, “I was able to make connections to refugee children and teens while paying attention to increasing refugee issues and think about ways to support their safety and opportunities to better their future” (Discussion board post, 4/6/2019). Along the same lines, Carly reflected that:

Beauty can also distract us from the underlying truth about the tragedies that these people have suffered... But we must remind ourselves that behind these smiles, there may be some dark thoughts or traumatic memories, which can manifest themselves in a number of ways. Some people may have trouble sleeping or concentrating, while others may be scared of loud noises. Happiness in a particular moment does not negate the emotional, psychological, and perhaps physical scars that these refugees are dealing with. (Beauty and Truth attachment, 4/6/2019)

Carly anticipated using this GTR with her future students to build critical media literacy as well as awareness and to motivate them to take action on global issues.

The last GTR, “Circles of Action,” prompted the graduate students to consider concrete ways they could incorporate this increased awareness into their practice as educators. The provocation guided them through a series of videos, websites, and articles about the unique educational challenges that refugee-background students experience as well as several strategies and models in use at schools around the world. They responded to the following questions to reflect on practical actions they could take in their circles of influence and difficulties they might encounter:

1. What can I do to contribute to supporting refugee students in my future classroom?
2. What can I do to contribute to supporting refugee students in my community (in my school, neighborhood, place of worship)?
3. What can I do to contribute to responding to the refugee students in the world (beyond my immediate environment)?
4. Is it important for me to consider taking action in responding to the needs of refugee students on a personal, local, and global level? Why or why not? What barriers might I face to taking productive action at various levels?

Drawing on her experience as an adult educator who had worked with many refugee learners, Ashley shared practical ways to address learning and practical needs and to support cultural adaptation, belonging, and agency with her classmates. Carly voiced a desire to “foster a supportive learning environment and let my students know that I am always available if they need someone to talk to” (Circles of Action attachment, 4/6/2019) while also communicating with parents and watching for possible cognitive or behavioral difficulties related to previous experiences. Katie expressed that awareness and sensitivity would be crucial for working with refugee students, writing that:

offering opportunities for them to share their stories to the extent to which they are willing to share, helping them raise awareness of the situations in their home countries, and helping them create friendships with other students will be a priority for me as a teacher. (Circles of Action attachment, 4/7/2019)

Regarding actions they could take outside of the classroom, participants mentioned volunteering to welcome newcomers, increasing awareness among their social networks, fundraising for non-profits that serve refugees, and advocating for compassionate policy and practice at the school, community, and national level.

Idea Sketch

The graduate students concluded the unit by creating an “Idea Sketch” of a classroom lesson incorporating a global issue, an “I can” statement or performance outcome (Asia Society, 2013), one of the GTRs they had tried out, resources from the weekly modules, and

reflection on their learning. They shared these lesson ideas via a discussion board and provided peer feedback. The idea sketches targeted a variety of age groups, from kindergarten to high school, and addressed an array of current global issues, from bullying of students with disabilities to the defection crisis in North Korea.

The lessons, reflections, and subsequent exchange of peer feedback indicated that the participants had found the TfGC modules useful for designing instruction that helps students “make a meaningful connection to global issues and to think critically to take actions” (So-Hyun, discussion board post, 4/22/2019). The participants admitted the difficulty of identifying age-appropriate issues and matching them to content area objectives; as Lisa confessed, “this is not yet something that feels natural” (Idea Sketch attachment, 4/24/2019). However, they expressed a desire to continue to improve their own capacity to help future PK-12 learners to “gain meaningful attachments to issues, remove negative stereotyping toward others, [and] work toward bettering the world that they are living [in]” (So-Hyun, Idea Sketch attachment, 4/22/2019).

Discussion

By engaging with a variety of carefully selected texts and pedagogical tools, participants in this AR project seemed to gain awareness about the experiences and needs of refugee-background students. In turn, these current and future teachers explored ways to foster awareness among their PK-12 learners about global issues like the current worldwide refugee crisis. This project suggests that the presentation of real-world experiences of today’s refugee-background students through structured, scaffolded learning experiences can be a powerful and effective way to engage pre- and in-service educators in delving into this global issue and recognizing its threads across time and contexts. At the same time, these graduate students gained experience with instructional strategies that they could apply in their own teaching now or in the future to encourage PK-12 learners to inquire about the world, consider multiple perspectives, engage in respectful dialog, and take responsible action (Boix Mansilla & Jackson, 2013). We believe these perspectives and strategies are also valuable for those who teach adult refugee-background learners, as they and their children will have experienced similar challenges.

Given the ever-rising numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, it is crucial for educators to be informed about the impact of forced migration on students and to be prepared to respond. This AR project aimed to begin fostering this awareness, share some practical tools, and point participants toward additional resources to continue developing their skills for inclusive teaching of refugee and immigrant students. Current research suggests the urgency of this work (Duran, 2020; Gagné, Schmidt, & Markus, 2017). As Ficarra (2017) emphasizes, it is teachers who “often have the most personal interaction with refugee students. Therefore, their training around issues of multiculturalism but specifically on the refugee experiences is essential to their ability to support students with these backgrounds” (p. 79). Although its scope may be small, we hope that this project may inspire other teacher educators and teacher trainers to seek ways to foster teacher candidates’ confidence in and commitment to teaching for global competence, particularly around the pressing need for knowing and responding to refugee-background students’ experiences.

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