Becoming German:
A Critical Look at Refugee Education in Germany

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Abstract

This paper examines education for refugee children in Germany through the lens of contemporary childhood studies. When children resettle in Germany they are not only permitted, but also required to attend school. They are put on a fast, straight track to learning German so they can get matriculated into mainstream classes as quickly as possible: their only shot at succeeding in Germany's highly stratified school system (SBJW, 2016). But does this intense focus on the future meet the needs of this population of children in the present? Eurocentric and nativist attitudes behind integration rhetoric are explored, including how they factor into teaching approaches in so-called *welcome classes* for Germany's young newcomers. Why and how should schools look after the mental health of its students? The case is made for the incorporation of creative expressive interventions in the classroom as a means of enhancing students' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and ultimately agency.

Keywords

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Introduction

Children as becomings

Childhood has traditionally been viewed in an anticipatory sense, in which children are on a journey and the destination is adulthood (Qvortrup, 2009). Understanding the structural form of childhood in this way shapes adults' attitudes towards children, as well as children's perceptions of themselves (Qvortrup, 2009). Across many fields of study and throughout society at large, childhood is regarded as a stage, a step on the way (Jenks, 1996). Jenks (1996) elaborates this point:

> The type of 'growth' metaphors that are readily adopted in discussions about childhood all pertain to the character of what is yet to be and yet which is also presupposed. Thus childhood is spoken about as: a 'becoming'; tabula rasa; laying down the foundations; shaping the individual; taking on; growing up; preparation; inadequacy; inexperience; immaturity, and so on. (p. 8)

Associating children exclusively with the future runs the risk of failing to regard childhood as a coherent social practice in and of itself (Jenks, 1996). Qvortrup (1985) coined the now commonly used phrasing when he described the problem of viewing children as "not human beings but human becomings" (Qvortrup, 1985, p. 132).

Children as beings

More recently, the discourse on childhood challenges the perception of children as *becomings* by seeing the child as a social actor; a whole person containing a set of needs and rights in the present, independent of a presumed future version of themselves (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Rather than understand children as first and foremost people in training – waiting to become whole - they should be appreciated for their current personhood. This conceptual shift does not require a disregarding of a child's future potential, opportunities, or aspirations. On the contrary, responding to the needs and wishes of children in the present also, in turn, serves to support and bolster them as they grow.

Refugee[13] children in Germany

This paper takes a critical look at how children are framed as becomings in the context of young refugees attending public schools in Germany. According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (2018), never before has the world seen so many people forced from their homes. More than half of the nearly 22.5 million refugees on the move today are under the age of 18 (UNRA, 2018). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2017) reported that in 2016 alone, approximately 1.3 million people came to Germany as refugees, 30 percent of them children.

When displaced children resettle in Germany they enjoy the right to education (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Wissenschaft, 2016). In fact, school in Germany is compulsory from the

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[13] For the purposes of this paper, the term *refugee* will be used to refer to children who, alone or with their families, are seeking, have been granted or denied refugee status in Germany.

first grade on, so children are required to exercise this right (Döbert, 2015). Refugee school children are put on a fast track to German language acquisition in order to be matriculated into mainstream classes as quickly as possible (SBJW, 2016). It could be said that children in this situation are not only exposed to the burden of becoming an adult, but also, in a way, of becoming German.

Can this intense focus on the future though meet the needs of this population of children in the present? This paper reveals how fundamental elements of German schools, as well as broader, macroeconomic forces present obstacles for newcomers that stem from colonial and Eurocentric ideologies surrounding children and childhood. How can Germany support its new student population by appreciating them not only as becomings, but first and foremost as beings? Incorporating creative expression interventions with a therapeutic orientation in classrooms will be considered as a way to take on this worthy challenge.

The institutionalization of childhood

One could easily assume that speedy language acquisition and integration into the German school system is a goal based chiefly on the well-being of refugee children. However, widening the scope of the question allows for additional interpretations regarding the forces underpinning this effort. In her work, *Individualization and Institutionalization of Childhood in Today's Europe*, Näsman (1994) discusses how

> The twentieth century has witnessed increased levels of institutional control over children. The introduction of compulsory schooling and children's formal exclusion from paid work signaled a historical tendency towards children's increasing compartmentalization in specifically designated, separate settings, supervised by professionals and structured according to age and ability. (pp. 32-33)

The author understands this modern treatment of children as influenced by overarching economic forces, such as increasing competition in the world economy (Näsman, 1994). The less states are able to exert full control over their own economic circumstances, the more they tend to regard children as the future labor force (Näsman, 1994). Molding and securing the qualified and robust workforce of tomorrow usually means tighter regulations and increased standardization of what and how children learn at school today (Näsman, 1994).

Social injustice in German education institutions

Institutions have an especially strong effect on children in Germany. In *What is Childhood? Questions and Answers from Sociology*, Hungerland and Luber (2008) bring forth the example of Germany's highly stratified school system to illustrate how social institutions can work to maintain society's existing power structures. At around the age of 12, students are placed on one of three educational tracks, likely determining the nature of the rest their professional and economic lives (Döbert, 2015). Rather than create equal opportunities for students, the system confirms and further fortifies existing social inequalities (Hungerland, 2008). The connection between one's socio-economic background and success in the German school system is especially strong in children and youth with mixed heritage (Döbert, 2015). This is confirmed by international PISA research (OECD, 2013).

The specific case of refugee children in Germany offers yet another lens through which to view the system. If racial segregation is already occurring in the German school system (Döbert, 2015), then how will the children presently arriving in Germany as refugees fit into this hierarchy? Pinson, Arnot, and Canappa (2010) point out that

> By exploring the educational responses to the presence of asylum-seeking and refugee children in our schools, we can learn about the social and political values of our education system and the ways in which its principles of inclusivity and cohesion operate in the context of globalizing forces. (p. 1)

Germany's schools may help maintain the status quo by holding marginalized people in the margins, but can refugee children be supported in ways that move towards the dissolution of the margins?

Children as a minority group and intersectional discrimination

In *Key Concepts in Childhood Studies*, James and James (2008) explain how, as a social group, children occupy a space in society that is largely separated and segregated from the majority adult population. Their lack of political power and limited control over access to resources leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination (James & James, 2008). Children are already members of a minority group (James & James, 2008), if for no other reason than being "underage." However, refugee children in Germany, belonging to multiple minority groups beyond their status as children (regarding ethnicity, religion, political status, etc.) are at risk of experiencing intersectional discrimination (Liebel, 2014). This can occur when prejudice based on age is combined with – or masked by – other forms of discrimination (Liebel, 2014). One may, for example, refer to a child's young age to conceal a racist motive (Liebel, 2014).

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Othering, nativism, and integration

German society is culturally heterogeneous, but the freedom to live in individualized and different ways has led to dwindling commonalities binding different segments of society to one another (Döbert, 2015). This phenomenon is reflected in the preferred term evoked when discussing immigrants in Germany: *integration*. The word is ambiguous and blurry and therefore well suited for political and tactical discourse, leaving plenty of room for political idleness, while creating an illusion of societal consensus (Löffler, 2011). The word *integration* is used both as a synonym for multiculturalism – a cultural pluralism in which various cultures co-exist – as well as for assimilation, where a minority group member fully adopts dominant, mainstream cultural norms (Löffler, 2011). What then does it mean to encourage refugees to integrate?

De Genova (2005) argues that both sides of the discourse on migration "are systematically concerned with what a native *we* should do with a foreign *them*" (p. 62). In *The "European" question: Migration, race, and post-coloniality in "Europe,"* De Genova (2016) explains how the language used in the discourse is indicative of a steady stream of anxiety surrounding post-colonial transformation. Migration is described as a problem, which naturally threatens the normative good of the dominant society (De Genova, 2016). With this comes a variety of strategies and procedures for the "'inclusion' of migrant 'outsiders,' or perhaps for compelling

'foreigners' to figure out how to appropriately 'integrate' themselves" (De Genova, 2016, p. 345).

De Genova's words echo Freire's in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). He similarly observes the paternalistic underpinnings behind regarding oppressed people as "welfare recipients" or a pathology of an otherwise healthy society (Freire, 1970, p. 55).

When considering the reception and inclusion of refugee children into German schools, it is important to keep in mind that their childhoods may have looked very different from a typical German childhood. Even more important is maintaining awareness that there is no one, correct childhood. Harding (1998) reminds us that

> Even individuals with the highest moral intentions, and with the most up-to-date, state-of-the-art, well-informed, rational standards according to the prevailing institutions and their larger cultures, can still be actively advancing institutional, societal, and philosophic eurocentrism. (pp. 14-15)

Kincheloe (2008) extends Harding's assertion that researchers and pedagogues can sometimes be blind to Eurocentric and reductionist assumptions underlying our social institutions and scholarly communities, by adding that these ideologies affect our economic policies, creating the "'ground zero' of twenty-first century oppression" (p. 181).

Banking education

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Freire (1970), too, examines how macroeconomic forces of systemic oppression are manufactured in social institutions. He transcends theoretical musings though, by linking these explorations to the individual's experience of education in oppressive institutions. The picture he paints from almost half a century ago is unfortunately still quite relevant today. He describes the *banking* concept of education, "in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" issued by the teacher (Freire, 1970, p. 53). Following the banking method of teaching, the educator replaces genuine communication with the issuing of static information to be memorized and repeated (Freire, 1970).

Freire (1970) believed that as a consequence of banking education, aside from the students filing away in their minds empty assertions from the teacher, the students themselves are filed away when they are deprived of creativity, transformation, and knowledge. He asserts,

> For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, individuals cannot be truly human. Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry humans pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other. (Freire, 1970, p. 53)

This is not simply a matter of stimulating a child's mind so that they might be able to perform better academically. Freire (1970) sees banking education as an extension of the mentality that humans are adaptable and manageable. The harder the students work to be successful in storing the information deposited into them, "the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1970: 54). Applied to the present example of refugee children in Germany, it is then indisputable that

how children and youth are seen by their educators – and, in turn, how they may learn to see themselves – has broad implications for their agency and participation in society.

1. Educating Refugee Children in Germany

Welcome classes

The city of Berlin has had special classes for children new to Germany for several decades now, originally called *classes for new arrivals without knowledge of the German language* (Senatsverwaltung für Bildung, Jugend und Familie, 2017). With the arrival of thousands of new students in and around the year 2015, the name was changed to *welcome classes* (SBJF, 2017). According to a report on schools in Berlin, published by the senate department for education, youth, and family (SBJF, 2017), as of January 2017, 12,570 children were enrolled in 1,067 welcome classes in Berlin.

The current procedures for integrating new students into the education system in Berlin is outlined in a guide (SBJW, 2016) published by the city's senate department for education, youth, and science. According to this manual, children from outside of Germany who live in the country with a residence permit, or those who are seeking asylum with or without their families, are legally required to attend school (SBJW, 2016). Even if a child's family is not granted (or loses their status of) asylum, they are no longer required to attend school, but still possess the right to (SBJW, 2016).

If a child arrives in Germany as a non-native German speaker without having attended a German school in the past, they must take a language test. If a child's German is deemed sufficient, or if they are young enough to be placed in either first or second grade, they join a mainstream class. If they are too old for the first or second grade and their German skills are deemed insufficient, children are enrolled in a welcome class, held parallel to mainstream classes in elementary schools, secondary schools, and high schools. Children are meant to attend welcome classes for no longer than one year (SBJW, 2016).

In regards to the purpose of the welcome classes, the guide (SBJW, 2016) clearly states: "The goal is the fastest possible acquisition of the German language, to enable a swift transition into a mainstream class" (p. 11). Does this approach leave enough room though, for children to be appreciated as beings, right now? In an environment where there is not only heavy emphasis on learning German, but also on the speed of language acquisition, there is great potential for additional pressure to be placed on a group already living under the weight of countless possible burdens. If children are evaluated exclusively on academic performance, they may miss out on the chance to discover and develop competencies outside this limited and stringent realm of aptitudes. It is as if Germany views these students as immediately lagging behind, defining them first and foremost by what they do not yet have. Refugee children stand to benefit greatly from being characterized by their skills and competencies rather than their deficits or weaknesses.

The role school plays for refugee children

Timmerman (2008) brings attention to the fact that "between the ages of 6 and 12, school typically plays the leading role in a child's life – the way there and back, social interactions in the breaks, class trips, and so on" (p. 189). In addition to the importance school holds for any child, for a refugee what happens – or does not happen - in these first years of school upon resettlement is of crucial importance. A refugee child's well-being is largely affected by successes and failures at school (Richman, 1998). As parents are often unable to speak the local language, they may not be able to help children as much as they would like to (Richman, 19998). This means children are often required to deal with difficulties at school on their own (Richman, 1998). As "educational progress and emotional well-being are mutually dependent," school policies are a crucial part of the equation (Richman, 1998, p. 65). They have the potential to assist a child in reestablishing a sense of safety, normalcy, confidence and self-esteem, while preventing frustration and isolation (Richman, 1998).

With so much in flux, school can provide a constant, fixed, and stable routine for a child (Zito & Martin, 2016). Ideally, social contacts, opportunities for achievement, and the chance to begin constructing future endeavors can also be found at school (Zito & Martin, 2016). In their study, *Belonging and connection to school in resettlement: Young refugees, school belonging, and psychosocial adjustment*, Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) observe that schools are typically the first point of contact a refugee child has with the greater community in their new home. In their study examining school belonging among newly resettled Somali refugees (aged 12-19) in the north-eastern United States, researchers found that beyond the stabilization school can provide, fostering a sense of school belonging can have substantial positive effects on a child's educational experience (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). The researchers found that feeling more attached, committed, involved, and spirited about one's school is directly linked to decreased levels of depression and heightened self-efficacy among young refugees (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007).

Gaining a sense of school belonging, however, does not come easily, as the task of adjusting into a brand new school system is often filled with obstacles. In *A systematic review of school-based social-emotional interventions for refugee and war-traumatized youth*, Sullivan and Simonson (2016) note, "several studies have documented high rates of anxiety, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder among refugee youth" (p. 506). Aside from diverse and possibly severe preflight traumas lived by young refugees (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016), many children miss long periods of schooling as a result of war and flight (Kia-Keating & Ellis, 2007). This means that on top of possibly dealing with lacking language skills and emotional distress, success at school is even more challenging as many children have missed out on learning skills they may be expected to already have based on their age.

Schools and mental health

Sullivan and Simonson (2016) also found that among a sample of refugees in the Netherlands, despite reporting substantially higher needs and greater desire for mental health services, they were far less likely than control samples to receive them. Language and cultural barriers, lack of information about the local health system, lack of access to transportation or funds are just a few

of a myriad of obstacles standing between refugee children and mental health service (Sullivan &
Simonson, 2016).

As children are required to attend school, it is the most practical starting point for monitoring and
caring for students' mental health (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). Schools also stand to benefit
from taking psychological well-being of its students into consideration (Sullivan & Simonson,
2016). As academic success is connected to mental health (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016), caring
for students in this way also promotes positive educational outcomes. Tending to mental health
then falls into the philosophy of regarding children first as beings, while not altogether
disregarding their status of becomings either.

Support systems embedded in German schools

In his chapter on Germany in *The Education Systems of Europe,* Döbert (2015) explains that
German schools contain what are known as *support systems,* consisting of "school supervision,
school counseling, in-service training of teachers, school-related counseling by experts,
evaluation of schools, regional cooperation among schools, psychological services, school social
work, school expert information, and media services" (p. 311). With possibilities for a high level
of coordination among different sectors under the umbrella of one school system, schools in
Germany seem to be especially well positioned to oversee and actively support the psychosocial
well-being of refugee children attending these institutions. Often times it may be unrealistic for
children to be connected to independent mental health services (for reasons listed below), but as
they are permitted and even obligated to attend school, therein exists a great opportunity to
provide care beyond delivering the standard academic curriculum.

The systems of support that German schools have in place can also lead to unintended
consequences though. In *Traumatized Children and Youth in the Classroom: A Practical Guide
for Teachers*, Christiane Pillhofer (2017) comments that when a child disrupts lessons through
their behavior, teachers often begin deferring responsibility to deal with the "problem" child to
school counselors, therapists, or doctors. She argues that this compartmentalizing of support can
obscure an issue's most obvious causes and solutions: acknowledging and appreciating the
child's present living conditions and the creation of a therapeutic atmosphere in the elementary
school class (Pillhofer, 2017). The structure in place to provide a wide range of support is
fundamentally helpful, but it should not be relied upon to replace vital practices in the classroom.

2. Post-Colonialism and the Treatment of Refugee Children

Before introducing studies in which therapeutic creative expression interventions have yielded
promising results, it is important to call attention to a few significant limitations. The experience
of war, forced migration, or resettlement is subjective. It is therefore essential that teachers, other
school staff members, or volunteers working with refugee children do not purport to know or
understand what children have seen or are feeling. Migratory experiences are particular and it is
essential that the needs of children are not universalized (Pinson & Arnot, 2007).

Cultural sensitivity

As Germany supports the displaced children seeking refuge within its borders, care must be taken to avoid placing majority-world people into minority-world boxes. What constitutes trauma, if and how one "manages" or "works through" possible effects of trauma, as well as how one regards emotions varies widely from individual to individual and also from culture to culture. In *Forced Migration and Mental Health: Rethinking the Care of Refugees and Displaced Persons*, Summerfield (2005) asserts,

> The notions that 'traumatic stress' causes psychological disruption may be invalid in cultures that emphasize fate, determinism and spiritual influences. There is a serious possibility that the Western trauma discourse imported into the lives of people whose meaning systems have been devitalized by war and forced displacement might impair their struggle to reconstitute a sense of reality, morality and dignity. (p. 101)

Western society has become increasing psychologically minded and therapy is seen as a form of assistance many people utilize, not only the mentally ill (Richman, 1998). In many majority-world countries where refugees come from, this is not the case and therapy may be viewed as help for the "mad" (Richman, 1998). Any kind of therapeutic intervention used with children from communal societies should therefore be carried out with caution, as individualistic attitudes surrounding expressing feelings and disclosing personal information could potentially be culturally inappropriate (Richman, 1998).

Pathologizing pain and eurocentrism in psychology

Being mindful of cultural diversity is important, but so is being mindful of the biases that color our concept of diversity to begin with. Euro-American psychology is Eurocentric, but a larger problem is that it fails to recognize that it is Eurocentric (Leong & Wong, 2003). Even cross-cultural psychology within Euro-American traditions is Eurocentric by virtue of trying to apply Euro-American research to completely different cultures (Leong & Wong, 2003).

There is a tendency in Western Europe to apply medical labels and diagnoses to people reacting normally to horrific events, such as the broad and frequent reference to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Summerfield, 2005). Countries receiving forcibly displaced children should be aware of and sensitive to the atrocities they may have witnessed. However, just as important is being wary of the assumption that the "biopsychomedical paradigm" that Western psychiatry and psychotherapy sits upon can be applied to everyone, regardless of how one understands the mind and body (Summerfield, 2005, p. 101). Summerfield (2005) goes on to explain how "psychiatric universalism risks being imperialistic, reminding us of the colonial era when what was presented to indigenous peoples was that there were different types of knowledge, and that theirs were second-rate" (p. 101). What may be seen as "help" to one person from one culture may not translate as such to the recipient of the offer. The same mentality that spawns a desire to assist a vulnerable population could come with unintended paternalistic attitudes. Shifting the focus from offering help to offering solidarity could serve to dismantle this conundrum.

Stigma and vctimization

Furthermore, viewing individuals who have experienced great hardship as possessing a deep or long-term psychological wound can create a stigma for them (Summerfield, 2005). Pinson and Arnot (2007) warn, "the discursive framing of trauma can render such children weak and vulnerable, as traumatized rather than violated by political and personal oppressions" (p. 402). Rather than empower children and expand their opportunities for agency and participation, linking human pain to an impairment could "muffle what they themselves want to say (not least politically), distort assistance priorities, and color how society comes to think of them, and they of themselves" (Summerfield, 2005, p. 104).

3. Mechanisms of Motivation

Learned helplessness and coping

While it is necessary to remain aware of potential implicit biases, there are nevertheless attributes of and concepts within the western study of psychology that are well worth consideration. One of these concepts is that of *learned helplessness* and its impact on personal agency, coping, and the power of self-efficacy (Seiler, 2013).

In her book, *Resilience: Fostering Hardiness among Children in Daycare*, Seiler (2013) evokes Seligman's 1979 model of learned helplessness to explain that when a child repeatedly experiences uncontrollable events, they are likely to develop feelings of helplessness, leading to the child viewing themselves as incompetent. This can result in a child expecting to be unable to change a situation even when they may be able to (Seiler, 2013). Learned helplessness can elicit not only emotional resignation and feelings of hopelessness, but also a loss of motivation to try to influence a situation or to test out one's own skills (Seiler, 2013).

Considering the case of refugee children in Germany, Seiler's (2013) descriptions can be combined with Freire's (1970), who observes that people in disadvantaged positions in society often engage in self-deprecation spawned from having internalized the opinion their oppressors hold of them. To Freire, it is unsurprising that oppression results in the oppressed distrusting themselves and failing to acknowledge "that they, too, 'know things'" (1970, p. 45).

Seiler (2013) notes that because children have less experience with stressful life events than adults may have, they are often less able to identify and utilize resources they possess to handle a difficult situation. Children are also typically confronted with problems related to their families or social-economic status that are largely outside of their own control (Seiler, 2013). A third challenge to developing adaptive coping strategies is that in a highly structured place like school, children are threatened with punishment for employing coping mechanisms that adults might, such as avoidant strategies like daydreaming, walking away from an undesired situation, or refusing to perform an undesired task (Seiler, 2013).

Self-efficacy

Reversing a sense of helplessness requires gaining convictions of self-efficacy: the subjective belief that one's own skills and actions can be drawn upon and implemented to effectively manage difficult tasks (Seiler, 2013). Self-efficacy underlies how one participates at school because how effective one perceives themselves to be plays a large role in the activities they choose to engage in, how much energy they will expend on them, and how persistent they will be when confronted with difficulty (Bandura, 1977). If the mind can be compared to a machine, self-efficacy might be likened to the battery that powers it.

One school in Thüring, Germany, The Wenigenjena comprehensive school (containing grades one through ten), has placed self-efficacy, along with autonomy, competence, and a sense of connectedness, at the core of its educational concept (Weyrauch & Zech, 2017). They are the first in Germany to fully implement the pedagogical theory of *intensive understanding learning* (Weyrauch & Zech, 2017). In this model, *understanding* is distinguished from the term *learning*. As opposed to learning, understanding involves an active, constructive process consisting of a reciprocal interaction between experience, imagination, comprehension, and metacognition (Weyrauch & Zech, 2017). The Wenigenjena school may represent an example of the type of "liberating education" Freire writes about, which "consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (1970, p. 60).

The Wenigenjena school is pushing the boundaries of what the German support system can offer. A fundamental element of the school is its social workers, available to all students, but especially catering to underprivileged students (Weyrauch & Zech, 2017). The school willingly takes responsibility for providing a bridge between students and access to valuable social resources.

Cultivating interest through problem-posing education

Seiler (2013) reports that children who have developed high levels of resiliency often rely on a special interest or hobby that consoles them during hard times. School, and in particular classes for newcomers, could provide space (both physical and emotional) for refugee children to cultivate hobbies or interests. This could be facilitated with more experimental and experiential methods, bearing in mind Freire's answer to banking education: *problem-posing education* (1970). In this style of education, the hierarchy between teacher and student must first be resolved, resulting in both children and teachers learning from one another (Freire, 1970). Freire summarizes the juxtaposition of the two forms of teaching:

> Whereas banking education anesthetizes and inhibits creative power, problem-solving education involves a constant unveiling of reality. The former attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness; the latter strives for the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention* in reality. (1970, p. 62)

Schools can create conditions for the emergence of consciousness and critical interventions in reality by finding more ways to complement academics with creative and expressive arts.

4. Creative Expression Classroom Interventions

While studies on creative and expressive workshops in educational settings specifically for the population of displaced children are relatively scarce (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016), there are now both qualitative and quantitative studies demonstrating the effectiveness of such programs (Rousseau, Drapeau, Lacroix, Bagilishya, & Heusch, 2005).

Art, music, and drama sessions with a therapeutic orientation "provide individuals with outlets to express feelings and process emotions… develop social-emotional skills, and, by extension, reduce impairment and improve school behavior" (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016, p. 517). Attending to these areas of a child's life is not an alternative to traditional pedagogical methods, but a complement to them. Positive experiences gained through creative expression activities enhance a child's self-confidence (Rousseau et al., 2005), thereby supporting them in in their academic pursuits as well (Sullivan & Simonson, 2015).

Creativity's function

In his denouncing of banking education, Freire (1970) warns that it has the capacity to "minimize or annul creative power and to stimulate… credulity" (p. 54). Creativity is in many ways the opposite of oppression. To be creative is to look for new solutions to a problem and to bring elements of one's own imagination into reality.

In her practical guide, *In the Midst of the Whirlwind: A Manual for Helping Refugee Children*, Richman (1998) points out that many refugee children have had lacking opportunities for fun in their lives. Creative play and experimentation allows children to explore the material world and develop social skills (Richman, 1998). While creative activities may benefit all children, they hold a special significance for children who are deprived or who have special needs (Richman, 1998). Richman (1998) includes in these benefits:

> providing relaxation and enjoyment, and improving motivation to learn; encouraging integration in to a group; developing social skills and friendships; enabling success even if not good at [the local language], raising self-esteem, and not overemphasizing academic skills; affirming a positive identity through activities related to children's culture; exploring sensitive issues such as anger and bullying; and allowing expression of feeling in a safe way. (p. 75)

Creativity and agency

Standard subjects in school – including learning German – typically contain a "right" and "wrong" answer, but creativity requires subjectivity and invites exploration. Introducing different forms of creative arts in classrooms containing refugee children could broaden the range of ways one may express themselves, things one could be good at, and feel good about. In their *Evaluation of a classroom program of creative expression workshops for refugee and immigrant children*, researchers found that the sessions improved levels of self-esteem among participants (Rousseau et al., 2005). In the best case, this self-esteem can translate to empowerment, increasing a child's power to act, interact with and influence the world around them.

Language without words

In his writing on artistic, non-verbal forms of therapy, Timmerman (2008) asserts, "verbalization constitutes only a tiny slice of a universe of possibilities with which to communicate and express oneself" (p. 166). In addition to being non-verbal, music, art, dance and movement may be more accessible, as they are cross-cultural media (Chang, 2006). These approaches have the potential to foster a safe and comfortable environment for children, especially ones new to the culture, as they use modes of expression that are more familiar to them than a new verbal language.

A study on music therapy activities for refugee children describes workshops in which students were invited to share their musical cultures with the group, explore their personal identities, experience a sense of agency, and further develop social skills (Baker & Jones, 2006). A second stage of the same program took on the themes of adjustment, acculturation, anti-racism, and feelings of failure in the classroom (Baker & Jones, 2006). Broaching complicated subjects like these may typically be avoided in a traditional classroom setting with groups of children where teachers and pupils do not share a strong common language. Creative expression sessions in which non-verbal communication complements (and perhaps also facilitates) verbal language can provide an alternative way to explore complex topics.

Improved self-image through drama, drawing, and writing

In their study, Sullivan and Simonson (2016) examine various therapeutic creative expression approaches. Two studies in the review by Rousseau, Armand, Laurin-Lamothe, Gauthier, & Saboundjian (2012) and Rousseau, Benoit, Gauthier, Lacroix, Alain, Viger Rojas, & Bourassa (2007) assessed classroom drama workshops that centered on "language and dramatization… [and] acting out stories developed by participants addressing various themes related to family, friendship, migration, culture, identity, and belonging" (as cited in Sullivan & Simonson, 2016, p. 518). The results showed improved school performance (especially among boys) as well as decreased perception of impairment (Sullivan & Simonson, 2016). Another program included individual writing and drawing time followed by presentations to the group (Rousseau et al., 2005). The results demonstrated increased levels of self-reported popularity among children who participated in the workshops (Rousseau et al., 2005).

Group bonding through creative expression

A major advantage of therapeutic creative expression interventions in the classroom is that unlike traditional forms of one-on-one talk therapy, they provide opportunities to enhance group cohesion. Groups comprised of children with a similar background can rely on the group to share feelings in a non-threatening environment (Richman, 1998). Richman suggests that dealing with the "painful issues of loss, disappointment, anger, identity and loyalty" in groups "can be dealt with sometimes more easily than on an individual basis" (1998, p. 78). Rousseau et al. (2005) also confirmed, "the workshops participate in the reconstruction of a meaningful personal world while simultaneously strengthening the link of the child to the group" (p. 180). In *The Therapeutic Powers of Play*, Schaefer (1993) notes that improved problem solving and conflict resolution skills are among the most commonly reported benefits of therapy-based creative expression methods.

Creative work and teacher-student relations

Such methods could also work towards dissolving Freire's teacher-student contradiction mentioned above (1970). There is promise in this area, as Rousseau et al. (2005) found that the creative programs they evaluated "transform the teachers' perceptions of newcomers by placing an emphasis on their strength and their resilience, while not negating their vulnerabilities" (p. 180). This is a particularly inspiring finding, as shifting the perception teachers hold of children could in turn affect how children see themselves. Timmermann (2008) supports this suggestion when he points out that teachers during primary school years play a large role in transmitting to children societal values and norms. A school's methodology and the personality of its teachers greatly influence a child's experience during this time (Timmermann, 2008).

Using support systems to bolster creative expression interventions

Simonson (2016) explain that a major limitation of classroom interventions is "the reliance on specially trained therapists - or even teams of trained therapists - to implement treatment, which undermines the social validity of these interventions for most schools, where such interventionists could be cost-prohibitive" (p. 523). This may be a limitation that Germany is in a good position to overcome though. The existence of support systems in German schools could provide the infrastructure needed to implement such programs. The cost of involving trained professionals remains, but the high level of connectedness among various social sectors at the state level in Germany might serve to offset some of the financial strain.

Going Forward

An interesting area of future study could be how to effectively link creative and expressive arts therapists to school staff and volunteers, developing approaches that draw from psychotherapy, art education, and general pedagogy. How can classrooms be made truly safe spaces, and how can an alliance similar to a therapeutic alliance be cultivated amongst whole groups of teachers and students? There are methods for bringing in such elements that do not necessarily require full-fledged therapies and therapists. Interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation surrounding caring for mental health in schools may yield exciting results.

The creative expression interventions studied and reviewed above have been conducted primarily in classes specifically containing all or mostly students with experience of forced migration. It is, however, not just refugee children who stand to benefit from introducing more platforms for creativity and expression into classrooms. The non-academic skills like emotional awareness, self-esteem, and group empathy that such activities promote are invaluable to anyone living in today's world. The potential of these interventions to strengthen ties in a group and foster empathy for one another also means that forming groups of children with varied backgrounds could help build stronger, more unified communities. For many children, refugee or not, life is full of movement, impermanence, and instability, but an empowering and inclusive education is something one can take with them wherever they may go.

Conclusion

The historical moment Germany finds itself in right now is entirely new. The media tends to frame the current demographic shift with fear-mongering terms like "crisis" and "flood of migrants." It is indeed a crisis for the people who have had their lives turned upside down through violence and displacement. For Germany, however, this is an opportunity not only to exercise human compassion and solidarity, but also to benefit from the richness of a diverse society.

Germany is full of systems, structures, and supports. They need only to be operated with a rigorous respect for human dignity. To borrow again the words of Freire,

> The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not 'marginals,' are not people living 'outside' society. They have always been 'inside'- inside the structure which made them 'beings for others.' The solution is not to 'integrate' them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves.' (1970, p. 55)

When the dominant culture makes room for non-dominant cultures, it is not only the latter who wins, but the former as well. It is a mistake to regard diversity as something that needs to be tolerated, when it is absolutely something worth celebrating. For German children, it means they win the chance to learn more about the world around them, by getting to know their non-European contemporaries personally.

Inviting diversity and honoring human dignity involves routinely stepping back to scrutinize the status quo. Existing power structures and societal hierarchies are often questioned in the discourse on gender or race, for example. Perhaps too regularly overlooked is the fact that "postcolonial critique requires that adults place themselves in positions in which they must examine authority, power, knowledge, and even the will to understand. Adults must be willing to rethink and reconceptualize what they think they know about the child and childhood" (Canella & Viruru, 2004, pp. 83-84). Examining German institutions of childhood, focusing specifically on policies governing the treatment of refugee children, can reveal how institutions may restrict one's ability to act, but also how children's reactions to these confines (co-)produce agency (Esser, Baader, Betz, & Hungerland, 2016). When adults see children as under-formed, immature, and deficient, they risk teaching children to see themselves this way. If refugee children are made to feel that learning German and catching up at school define them, they may fail to recognize their strengths and personal resources. Adults can help release untapped potential in students by developing programming that stimulates, motivates, and strengthens children.

Too commonly missed are opportunities to find out what children need or want from children themselves. This is all the more important when considering refugee populations, as they may be especially underrepresented. Children, like everyone else, are the experts of their own lives. All of the world's leading professionals in the fields of education, pedagogy, psychology, and research could be assembled to assess the needs of refugee children, but never could they provide the insights that refugee children hold. Rather than thinking exclusively about how we can serve this population, we should also stop to think about what we can learn from them.

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