

Editorial

REFUGEE CRISIS OR HUMANITARIAN CRISIS?

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I warmly welcome the publication of this edition of *Policy and Practice* on the theme of ‘Development Education Perspectives on Migration’. In the so-called ‘Post-Truth’ world of fake news, disinformation, misinformation, entrenched borders, xenophobia, Islamophobia, increased hate crime and racism fuelled by New Right populism, it is *essential* that we have a strong counter-narrative concerning migration led by experts in the field of development education which is balanced and evidence based. While theorising about migration is a crucial aspect of what we do in an academic context, the development of models of good practice is, perhaps, even more important. Recent developments point to the need for the development education sector to: challenge mainstream media constructions concerning migration; promote media literacy (especially in second and third level education sectors) concerning media coverage of migration; and develop alternative media platforms that critique mainstream media assumptions and provide alternatives to the dominant or hegemonic perspectives in circulation. Above all else, as McMonagle argues in her article, we need to be developing greater levels of solidarity with refugees.

Anti-immigrant discourses are not just to be found in the sloganeering of New Right parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP), Front National or The Finns Party. Mainstream media coverage of events in the Mediterranean and elsewhere has tended to reproduce hegemonic understandings of migration that have done little to inform the public about the many complexities involved. I would go further and argue that the political economy of contemporary media ownership has resulted in coverage which is even more ill-informed and sensationalist than ever before. Indeed, the repeated use by the media and others of phrases like the ‘Refugee Crisis’ or

‘Migrant Crisis’ rather than naming recent events as a *Humanitarian Crisis* is profoundly telling in itself. The lazy application of such labels masks more than it reveals and carries with it the implication that the ‘crisis’ is the fault of migrants themselves. More often than not, news reports emphasise how the movement of people will inevitably have a negative impact on ‘us’ in the developed West and are conspicuously silent on the geo-political and economic reasons *why* people are forced to flee from their homelands in the first place. A recurring theme in media coverage across Continental Europe is that of the tide/flood/influx of migrants who are routinely ‘othered’.

The abject failure by the media industries to explain migration in more critical and nuanced terms has a direct bearing on public knowledge and public responses to these issues. By public knowledge, I am referring to not only the reactions of policy makers and the politically powerful but also the everyday reactions and behaviours of ordinary citizens towards migrants. In creating and circulating a hegemonic discourse that is comforting for ‘us’, the art is often in the absence. How migration is understood and is explained has a direct bearing on public knowledge and public action or inaction. It impacts upon local political discourse and on policy responses.

The problematisation of migration, of course, is nothing new (see Haynes *et al* 2016). Research on the relationship between media discourse and public beliefs undertaken by Haynes, Devereux and Breen (2009) evidences how, in an Irish context, asylum seekers, refugees and the asylum system itself are portrayed as inherently lacking in legitimacy. Asylum seekers and refugees are constructed as a threat to the illusory and constructed homogeneity of national and local communities. They are represented as a moral and physical contaminant of the imagined Irish body. They are seen as an economic threat to the prosperity of the nation and individual Irish tax-payers and are viewed as a criminal element presenting a threat to the personal safety and private property of the ‘legitimate’ Irish. These depressing findings are underscored by Rounds 1 to 7 of the *European Social Survey* which contains compelling data on the relatively low levels of willingness amongst the Irish public to accept migrants from poorer countries. Such findings reinforce the need for

informed debate and reliable evidence based information in order to educate the wider public. It is for this reason that the various articles contained in this edition are particularly important. Taken as a whole, they do a number of important things. As a rule, they engage critically with migration and present us with practical suggestions which allow for initiatives to be taken at local level whether in the classroom or in the wider community.

The difficult job of challenging the many myths concerning migration is at the centre of Eten's paper. Using a World System's perspective, he expertly explains recent migration patterns and points to the ways in which the media routinely circulate myths and mis-understandings. He correctly points to the role that the development education sector can play in challenging these influential discourses. A re-framing of migration in terms of critical post-colonial theory has the potential to go a long way in terms of representing migratory flows in a more positive way.

Problematic media coverage of migrants is also a sub-theme in Golden and Cannon's paper. It provides us with an account of an innovative workshop which attempted to promote understanding and empathy of the migrant experience in Limerick City, Ireland. The authors used the 1916 commemorations and Ireland's own history of migration as a starting point. They demonstrate that representations of migrants matter in that they have a direct bearing on how migrants see themselves in a 'host' community. The duality in terms of identity is stressed. Many migrants exist between the worlds of their homeland and their host country, never quite belonging or fitting in anywhere. There are many practical lessons to be learned for the wider development education sector from this local research project.

Negative public discourses concerning migration have a direct bearing on the experiences of many migrants. The internalisation of negative beliefs may underlie the psychological pressures felt by migrants resulting in schizophrenia, depression, self-harm and drug/alcohol abuse. Tarusarira puts the psychosocial dynamics of migration at the centre of his important paper.

He shows how development education is well placed to allow a more positive relationship between migrants and the citizens of host countries.

The psychosocial aspects of migration are shown to be a two way street and better social relationships (and the smashing of barriers and stereotypes) between migrants and citizens can be facilitated by increasing the amount of social interactions made possible by associational life. Tarusarira's paper highlights the usefulness of the multi-faceted development education model 'Training for Transformation' which was created by Hope and Timmel (1984). Unlike traditional pedagogical approaches, the problem-based strategy as devised by Hope and Timmel (1984) actively promotes greater agency, reflection and consciousness raising.

The challenges posed by recent global migration patterns for the Higher Education Sector are examined by Avery and Said in their well-argued paper. Taking Syria as a case-study, the authors discuss how the long-term strategies of the Higher Education Sector should not only focus on the important task of integration, but also on the re-building of regions which have been afflicted by conflict. They argue that there is a need:

“...for refugee higher education, oriented towards the needs of future reconstruction, peacebuilding and economic recovery. This kind of capacity will also be needed to build a bridge between the Syrian diaspora and reconstruction efforts within Syria itself”.

The response of the Higher Education Sector cannot afford to be parochial and must respond therefore at a macro-level to the needs of those countries affected by war, famine and under-development. It is not only the Higher Education Sector which needs to respond in this way. McMonagle argues that Ireland can do more to bring about greater solidarity. Citing the creation of student scholarships and private sponsorship, she notes how community groups, the private sector and educational institutions have the capacity to create new contexts which will allow for more positive experiences for refugees and their host countries.

To conclude, the displacement and movement of people is a key feature of globalisation. Given the inevitability of migration, it is essential that we respond in a fair and socially just manner. As the articles in this edition amply demonstrate, there are many positive and practical things that can be done in the realm of development education that can challenge pre-conceived notions and fears and foster greater solidarity between all of us as citizens of the world.

References

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