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Building a Pedagogy of Welcome in practice: ways to support refugee children in early childhood education and care through examination of professional positionality

Donna Gaywood, Tony Bertram and Chris Pascal

ABSTRACT

Child displacement levels are rising due to conflict and violence; early educators often provide the first sustained contact young refugee children have with host-country culture. Sensitive pedagogical practices can provide refugee children with a sense of safety as they navigate their new world. This article shares one aspect of a Pedagogy of Welcome, which was developed through a small-scale doctoral research project and investigated the lived experience of four Syrian refugee children in ECEC. Successful models and approaches that enabled ethical power sensitive research engagement have been translated into praxis encouraging educators to deeply examine their professional positionality. This study found ways to navigate differences between Judaism and Islam utilising shared values of welcome. This Pedagogy of Welcome offers a third way for educators to create respectful spaces of welcome for both refugees and other marginalised children.

KEYWORDS: Refugee children; Pedagogy of Welcome; early education; professional positionality; research in practice

Introduction

This article intends to share one aspect of a Pedagogy of Welcome, which can be utilised by early childhood practitioners to enable refugee children to participate fully in early education. It was developed through a small-scale doctoral research project, which investigated the lived experiences of refugee children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (Gaywood 2023). The Pedagogy of Welcome was presented as part of a doctoral thesis. It forms a unique contribution to knowledge as it uses some of the models created and the specific knowledge gained, which enabled the original research to be undertaken both ethically and practically. This paper draws directly from the thesis: The post-migration lived experiences of Syrian refugee children in ECEC in England: four children's stories (Gaywood 2023). The research process birthed these ethical approaches, and the Pedagogy of Welcome translated them into practice, thus enabling early educators to make the best use of research findings to promote welcoming practices. The war in

Syria (2015) provided a backdrop to the investigation, but the study was located within an English local authority. The residents were predominately White British and affluent, although there were hidden pockets of poverty with areas of rural isolation. Due to the demographic and absence of any significant refugee population, it was widely accepted that there was a lack of experience of working with refugee children. There was a concern about whether current early educational practices were able to serve refugee children well, whether general inclusive pedagogies were fit for purpose, and able to include displaced children along with their families.

Research concerning refugee and migrant children is growing within Early Childhood studies and has documented issues of accessibility to ECEC services (Lamb 2020; Silva et al. 2020; Tobin 2016; 2020) but this recent research mainly documents adults reporting their experiences. Although these studies are important “*for overcoming children’s and families’ risk of invisibility*” (Bove and Sharmahd 2020, 3), it is widely reported that research investigating refugee children’s experiences tends to be scarce (Bove and Sharmahd 2020; Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020; Vandekerckhove and Aarssen 2020; Wihstutz 2020).

Much of the existing research about children focuses on their mental health and well-being (Bryant et al. 2018; Fazel et al. 2012; Hart 2009; Measham et al. 2014). Media reporting seems to suggest that any trauma experienced by refugees is primarily located in pre- and peri-migration experiences (Snow 2020), however, both Hart (2009) and Measham et al. (2014) contradict this narrative by describing how,

“stresses experienced by young refugees during their exile and after their migration were more predictive of psychological problems than traumatic experiences before”. (Measham et al. 2014, 208/9)

In Sweden, von Knorring and Hultcrantz (2019) describe the symptoms of resignation syndrome, where asylum-seeking children are so traumatically triggered by the negative outcome of their family’s asylum claim, that they enter a psychologically induced coma-like state. Jacobsen (2014) points out that although “*existing psychological research focuses on what can be done to help people recover from trauma*” (Jacobsen 2014, 103), other elements of refugee’s post-migration suffering are often overlooked. She suggests that the psychological impact of significant loss and impoverishment associated with displacement is less visible and therefore remains under-researched, particularly where young children are the focus.

Pedagogy for refugee children

At the EECERA convocation (2020), Formosinho discussed the importance of pedagogy in Early Childhood education. She described how pedagogy is infused with values, ethics, the rights of children, democratic principles and the quality of teaching, thus demonstrating its importance in framing young children’s first learning context. For refugee children, scholars agree that education has a powerful role to play offering children a haven alongside an opportunity to achieve (Hek 2005; Seker and Aslan 2015; Tadesse 2014; Walker 2011). From their investigation of very young refugee children’s mental health needs, Buchmüller et al. (2020) conclude that pedagogy can be a protective factor. They found that greater consistency enabled children a more helpful emotional

regulation environment, reducing levels of hyperactivity which supported their mental health.

Ragnarsdottir (2021) also describes some successful educational practices that were supportive and enabled Syrian refugee children to settle and begin to learn Icelandic. She noted the importance of preparing the host children who were taught Icelandic and Arabic songs to welcome the Syrian children. Early educators employed positive language practices, whilst investing time and energy to build trustful educational partnerships with the parents.

However, other studies highlighted less inclusive pedagogical practices and approaches, which created barriers for refugee children (Lamb 2020), making relationship building with early education staff and their peers more difficult (Peleman, Vandenbroeck, and Van Avermaet 2020; Picchio and Mayer 2019). Tobin (2020) found that although early educators were comfortable including home languages and relevant cultural holidays in their practice, there was more rigidity about pedagogical approaches. He outlines disconnect in perspectives of education between refugee parents and early educators, suggesting that, “*early childhood education in Europe and North America lack adequate attention to cultural differences*” (Tobin 2020, 11).

When attention is given to cultural adaptations, Wolf et al. (2020) found that the four Turkish families in their study, who had resettled in Europe, engaged more readily with ECEC. Silva et al. (2020) suggest an intercultural approach is more appropriate than traditional multiculturalism, concluding that staff would benefit from more training to foster “*a commitment to overcome mutual distrust and to identify forms of coexistence in diversity*” (Silva et al. 2020, 91). Strekalova-Hughes (2017) assessed early childhood teachers’ intercultural sensitivity, in the USA, finding that exposure to teaching refugee children did *not* necessarily improve teachers’ intercultural sensitivity. She concluded that “*children who are refugees are more likely to experience a teacher whose behaviours are preceded and shaped by a lack of intercultural sensitivity*” (Strekalova-Hughes 2017, 8). Therefore, she posits that

refugee children in early education require more input than merely ensuring individual teachers are culturally sensitive and enhanced training programmes. Rather further studies are needed which are located and grounded in the political and economic contexts of the children. (Gaywood 2023, 95)

As very young refugee children are often significantly marginalised and invisible (Bove and Sharmahd 2020) and given the role of pedagogy in ECEC, it seemed important to develop a cohesive pedagogy that could be supportive of refugee children, who find themselves in a unique position which is infused with the unsought powerlessness of their situation. The methodological and ethical approach used throughout the study aimed to bridge the divide between research and practice (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020), ensuring the research remained applicable and transferable, recognising that, “*Pedagogy is located in action – lived day by day, week by week*” (Formosinho 2020).

Aim

The intention of this article is to first describe the context of the study and then refer to the ethical bedrock of the research and the Pedagogy of Welcome. Next, the Pedagogy of

Welcome will be set within a theoretical framework, and ideas about professional positionality will be expanded and discussed. Finally, the implications of using a welcoming pedagogy will be considered.

Context

The primary participants in this study were four very young Syrian refugee children, who arrived in England with their families as part of the British government's Syrian Vulnerable Person resettlement scheme (SVPRS) (Home Office 2017). The scheme was launched in January 2014 as a response to the ongoing crisis in Syria. Across the Middle East throughout the Spring of 2011, citizens began to demand more democratic government in what became known as The Arab Uprisings. Demonstrations in Syria were crushed by the government, sparking a complex civil war.

As a result of the conflict, UNHCR published figures suggesting that one million of the refugees from Syria were under the age of 18 and 740,000 were under the age of 11 (UNHCR 2013). The British government responded to political pressure, so in September 2015 extended the Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Programme (SVPR) and committed to resettling *"up to 20,000 Syrian refugees"* over 5 years (Home Office et al 2018, 8). Local authorities in England volunteered to support refugees from Syria through the SVPR scheme by overseeing and implementing the resettlement process. The UNHCR criteria for being able to access the scheme included, *"women and children at risk, people in severe need of medical care and survivors of torture and violence, amongst others"* (Home Office 2017, 3).

Although all of the families in this study experienced significant pre-, peri- and post-migration challenges, the SVPR scheme offered the research participants higher levels of support which are often less available to other asylum seekers or refugees. Many of the stressors which could pose a greater risk to mental health as reported by Measham et al. (2014) were reduced. Generally, the nuclear family remained intact, their refugee status was granted without delay or uncertainty and secure housing and financial assistance were provided. Support workers were assigned to help navigate a new system and the parents had the right to work. The adults were expected to attend language classes and the families who arrived together, remained in close contact creating ongoing community support. Volunteers from the locality formed welcoming groups to provide practical and emotional assistance for the families.

Ethical considerations

A presentation, a question-and-answer session, with an interpreter, followed by an explanatory leaflet in Arabic, was used to gain parental consent to take part in the study. The parents explained the study to their children. The notion of ongoing assent (Dockett and Perry 2011) was adopted so a heightened sensitivity to each child's body language, non-verbal communication, and general demeanour was maintained. Extra home visits were undertaken, with the interpreter, to build relationships and negotiate preferred terms of engagement. The EECERA ethical code (Bertram et al. 2016) was adhered to throughout the study.

Ethically, the notion of vulnerability was important for this study, firstly because of the use of the term “vulnerable” within the SVPR scheme descriptor and because professionals were often quick to use the term to conceptualise refugee children and their families. From a social work perspective, Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen (2020) undertook a literature review focussed on the term vulnerability. They found that children were the largest group referred to in literature. Their review suggested a “*danger of using it (the term vulnerable) in a stigmatising, labelling, marginalising and objectifying way, denying agency and voice of those seen as vulnerable*” (Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen 2020, 336). The authors promoted an understanding of “*universal vulnerability*” (Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen 2020, 336), which recognises the shared vulnerability of all humans. They concluded that vulnerability is a contested notion that is complex and multifaceted, noting “*it is also important to recognise the temporal, situational, relational and structural nature of vulnerability*” and that, “*attention should be turned towards vulnerable life situations, social processes, society and its institutions*” (Virokannas, Liuski, and Kuronen 2020, 336). These ideas about universal vulnerability were adopted within the research and this article. Whilst it must be recognised that the children’s life circumstances meant that they were living with reduced power in terms of their position in society, which created a level of vulnerability, the notion of refugees being innately vulnerable, was rejected. The participant families were vociferous in their dislike of being thought of as vulnerable and the concept was incongruent with the ethics of researching refugee children (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020).

Issues of power were also a central concern when developing the methodology and the methods used in the study. A hybrid methodology combining praxeology (Formosinho and Oliveira Formosinho 2012; Pascal and Bertram 2012) and a polyvocal approach (Tobin 2016) was used to help capture the nuances of the children’s experiences (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020, 153).

Theoretical framework for the Pedagogy of Welcome

The research that generated the Pedagogy of Welcome utilised three seminal theories as the basis for a theoretical frame. A complex theoretical triad was developed centered on the educational social world of the study children and includes Said’s (1978) work on Orientalism, which is considered to be one of the foundational aspects of postcolonial theory, Tajfel and Turner’s (1979) work, which is concerned ideas about how groups develop social identity through membership of either In or Out groups, and the work of Vygotsky (1978), which identifies the social aspects of learning and the role of the More Knowledgeable Other. The lens draws on intersectional ideas from Critical Race Theory (Delgado, Stefancic, and Harris 2017) using the overlap of the three theories as the focal point (Figure 1).

This theoretical triad offered a multi-layered lens to examine the complex field, which proved to be responsive to the ongoing challenges of the field as well as the findings of the literature review and the ethical considerations, which were extensive (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020).

The Pedagogy of Welcome itself builds on a newer theory from the natural sciences, which was developed by Rayner (2017) from his lifelong study of fungi. Rayner (2017) established Natural Inclusion Theory, which documents an alternate response in

nature to the presence of new growth. Natural selection theory (Darwin 1859) suggests that plants and animals respond to threats by growing larger to dominate space, by depriving the other of light and space, thus causing a newer species or less hardy plant to wither and die. Or there is the response that has been described as the *survival of the fittest* where the strongest or most dominant animal fights to win survival. Again, those who have less power or who are weaker do not survive. Through his observations of fungi, Rayner (2017) noticed that as a species, they operate in a different way. He saw that they seemed to respond to new species or new growth by actively opening up a space and drawing the other fungi in, thus developing a naturally inclusive environment for the incoming fungi to live and thrive.

Within the refugee experience, it is easy to note natural selection theory in operation, with the refugees who manage to leave their homeland and find places of safety often being wealthy and strong. It is their survival drive that enables them to re-settle and build a new life away from everything familiar. However, on arrival in a new country, refugees regularly face prejudice and inhospitable polices and experience a significant status reduction. The findings of this study demonstrate that the refugee children were often isolated and rarely were able to make relationships with host-country children. The Pedagogy of Welcome seeks to translate Natural Inclusion (Rayner 2017) into an educative methodology that offers an opportunity for the creation of welcoming spaces that would not only allow the flourishing of children who are desperately isolated but also hold the possibility of new transformational learning communities.

Freire's (1970) work provided a second bedrock on which the Pedagogy of Welcome is built.

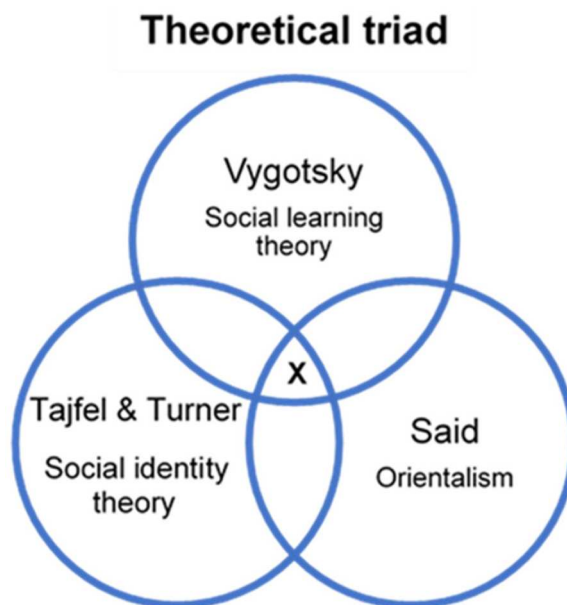


Figure 1. Complex intersectional theoretical triad.

Freire (1970) suggests that structures used in education can perpetuate oppressive systems which disempower learners. He puts forth a pedagogical construction which aims to challenge the “banking” system of learning and re-distributes power, by educators promoting and enabling their students to have their voices heard and recognised. (Gaywood 2023, 192)

Freire (1970) highlights the crucial role that education has to remediate the negative effects of inequality and the responsibility of the pedagogue to alert to not only the obvious but also the nuances of oppressive power-insensitive daily practice.

Discussion

The development of ideas of welcome

This study incorporated two of the world’s major religions: Judaism, the doctoral candidate’s cultural heritage, and Islam, the religion of the children and their parents who participated. Both faiths share the fundamental value of welcoming strangers and acknowledge the experiences of those who are dispossessed and who have lost a sense of belonging. Concerns were raised by a potential cultural guide about the impact of Israeli policy towards Palestinians in the West Bank, and how this might affect the recruitment and fieldwork phase, assuming the Syrian families would hold a natural enmity towards the researcher because of her religious background. However, on hearing about the researcher’s grandparents who were refugees, during the recruitment meeting, a unique sense of a shared bond was established. Subsequently, a warm welcome was extended each home visit and trust grew over Syrian coffee, sweets and fruit.

This warmth received, alongside notions about welcome and hospitality fed the next stage of the development of this supportive pedagogy. Gabi’s (2021) work investigated refugee children’s identity and sense of belonging. She noted,

Refugee children can be viewed as ‘strangers’ in a new country as they rely on the citizens of that country to welcome them and ‘host’ them so that they feel at home” (Gabi 2021, 138). As a result, her work proposed a “pedagogy of hospitality”. (Gabi 2021, 137)

Although this resonated strongly, Kyriakidou’s (2021) study in Greece which examined the public’s response to the refugee crisis in 2018 and the influence of the media, found that some groups of refugees were considered more deserving of hospitality than others. She describes this phenomenon as “*hierarchies of deservingness*” (Kyriakidou 2021, 139). So, although Kyriakidou acknowledges that “*hospitality is a helpful metaphor for engaging with the stranger*” (Kyriakidou 2021, 146), she also points out that hospitality is dependent on the host’s empathy. The existence of these “*hierarchies of deservingness*” suggests an uncomfortable power dynamic in operation between “host” and “guest” (Kyriakidou 2021, 147).

When considering a suitable pedagogy for educating already marginalised children, the suggestion of an unequal distribution of power embedded within the primary concept, was incongruent with the doctoral study. Having taken so much care to construct a research design, methodology and ethical approach which was power sensitive, it was important to remain consistent when considering praxis. (Gaywood 2023, 292)

The German government’s response to the vast displacement of Syrian people seemed to encapsulate a culture of welcoming the Other. The concept of *Willkommenkultur* and

its subsequent policy towards refugees resonated strongly with the study's emerging ideas of welcome. Equally, the policy and attitude seemed to present a tangible contrast to the policies adopted by the government of the Third Reich (1933–1945) which created the original displacement within the researcher's family. However, despite these bold restorative welcoming policies, Liebe et al. (2018) documented a dissonance within communities in Germany where good accommodation was difficult to access. They noted that the presence of refugees irritated local people as they felt the unfairness of accommodation allocation. This was also present within the study host community. Possible explanations for these host community responses to refugees appear to be rooted in anxiety and fear of being overwhelmed by the Other (Baum 2016) and feelings of “*psychological entitlement*” (Piotrowski et al. 2019, 723). Strong emotional responses were a recurring theme in the research with the host community often expressing conflicting emotions ranging from passionate welcoming practices to incidents of racism. Mayblin (2017) also considers host-country responses and examines the ongoing asylum and refugee debate in light of residual colonial legacies. She suggests that “*the refugee -is the embodiment of the darker side of modernity and of the global fallout from colonialism*” (Mayblin 2017, 3). However, the SVPR scheme that featured in this study was a policy that was expanded primarily in response to the British public's compassion on seeing the plight of child refugees (Soylu Yalcinkaya et al. 2018). This spirit of *Willkommenkultur* was identifiable within the original study and so it seemed congruent to pursue the notion of welcome, as a basis of a pedagogical response.

Natural Inclusion Theory (Rayner 2017) is helpful when trying to distinguish differences between welcome and hospitality. At the core of Natural Inclusion Theory (Rayner 2017) is the notion of dynamism or movement. When faced with the presence of a new species, the incumbent fungi actively opens up a living space and then creatively moves to draw the new species in. It is this role of active movement, or dynamism which can be helpful to differentiate the difference between hospitality and welcome. Within hospitality, the host may be active and busy, yet they remain in one place (static). The space they occupy belongs to them, so the host retains ownership of the space, and the “guest” is invited in. Any movement is made by the guest. When considering welcome,

the host has the possibility to act in a naturally inclusive way to actively and dynamically making space for the newcomer. The newcomer is afforded space of their own, which they can inhabit. Host and newcomer can both inhabit the space as equals who can flourish alongside each other. (Gaywood 2023, 293)

Pedagogy of Welcome

Figure 2 shares a diagrammatic version of the Pedagogy of Welcome. It shows the four central elements of the Pedagogy of Welcome: **professional positionality**, **making visible the invisible**, **creating open dynamic spaces of welcome** and **attention to wider concerns**.

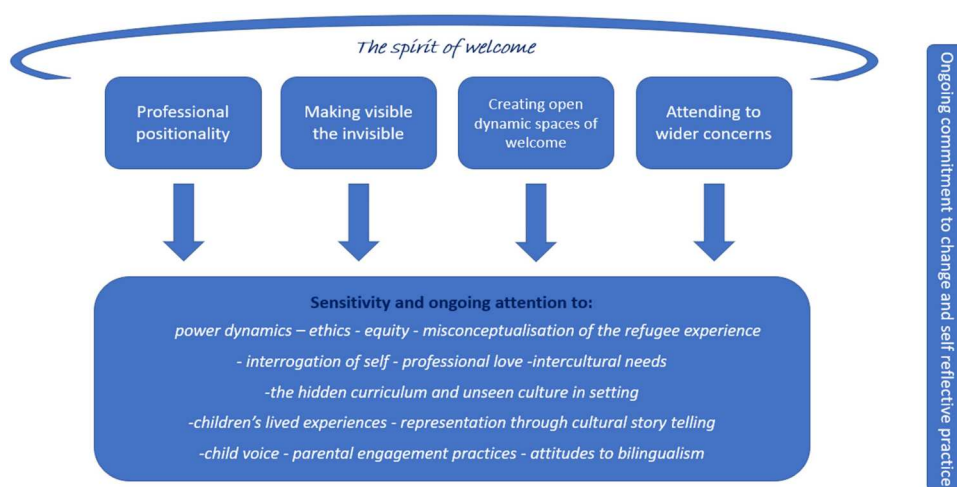
Whilst all the elements of the Pedagogy of Welcome are of equal importance, this article concentrates on the first aspect of the pedagogy and expands the ideas concerning professional positionality. It considers how professional positionality can assist educators in providing a deeper and more embodied welcome for refugee children. The article builds on the ethical work of Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal (2020). At the outset, it is

important to note that becoming a pedagogue who wishes to provide welcome requires a significant commitment to change. During the research process, the researcher had to address personal, professional and structural issues when she became aware of power imbalances. Out of this necessity, the development of the ethics for the research was responsive, ongoing, and dynamic. In the same way, those pursuing a Pedagogy of Welcome need to invest in a similar process. Self-reflection and critical analysis form the basis of this approach.

Examination of professional positionality

Throughout the study, the researcher spent much time examining her own positionality as a researcher (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020). This understanding of positional-ity, and the critical examination of self, enabled a more authentic engagement with the children and their families. Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal (2020) describe the work of Dwyer and Buckle (2009) and the importance of the hyphen between the words *insider - outsider* (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2020, 158). To connect with the partici-pants in the study, the researcher developed this notion and considered points of her own connection, which were described as “residing in the hyphen” (Figure 3).

Locating oneself in the hyphen can assist early educators in finding their own points of connection with any refugee children they are working with. Identifying shared experiences can provide a springboard to encourage welcoming practices. Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal (2020) also developed positional domains that enable educators to develop deeper notions of ways of working with refugee children. Reflecting honestly on the domain of attitudes with colleagues in a community of practice (Wenger 2000) offers educators the opportunity to consider how to embody these attitudes in everyday practice.



(Gaywood 2023)

Figure 2. Diagram to show the Pedagogy of Welcome.

The use of the positional domains (Figure 4) would provide a starting point. Alongside reflections about personal positionality, practitioners also need to consider how they position refugee children and their parents. Sensitivity to power dynamics within these positionings is also vital. As already mentioned, often practitioners' lack of knowledge about refugee experiences impacted their conceptualisation of the refugee children, which did little to reduce the children's isolation. Practitioners need to engage with some of the wider notions surrounding refugee children (Gaywood, Bertram, and Pascal 2023) to fully understand media representations and the impact on their own ideas around welcome, and the social interplays between host children and staff, refugee children and their families.

During the field work, close observations of the children not only illuminated their isolation but clearly demonstrated their inner strength, thus unseating the prevalent "traumatised victim" narrative (Bryant et al. 2018; Hart 2009; Measham et al. 2014). One of the research methods used in the original study to record the child participants lived experiences was focussed child observations drawing on the well-established work of Carr et al. (2002), Bertram, Pascal, and Saunders (2008), Laevers (2003) and Pascal and Bertram (2001). These can be utilised by educators who are interrogating their positionality, where detailed observations of the children's social interactions could also inform their self-reflection and team discussions. This would be part of an ongoing open dialogue with self, through a reflective diary, or as a community of practice where practitioners are encouraged to consider their own experiences of being an Insider or an Outsider, their attitudes (as outlined in the domain of attitudes, Figure 4) and their personal opinions and narratives about refugees.

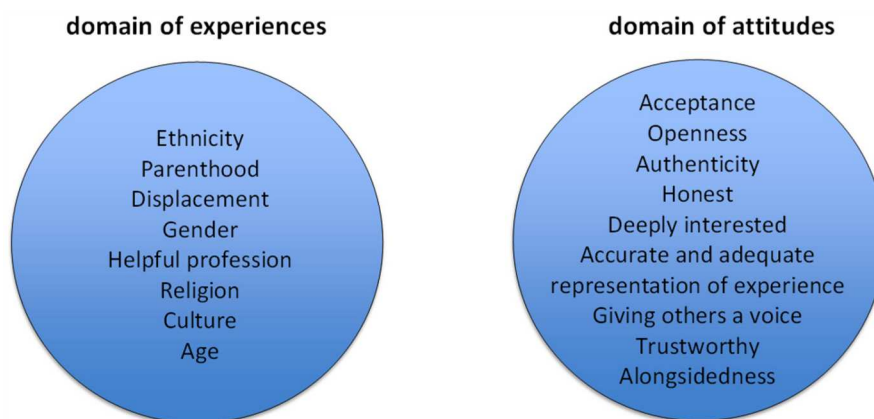
Embodiment of professional love

During the research, one of the children's mothers expressed concern that her daughter was not loved. This needed to be responded to in the Pedagogy of Welcome. Practitioners would benefit from understanding Professional Love outlined by Page (2018). Time



(Gaywood 2023)

Figure 3. Diagram to demonstrate points of connection: residing in the hyphen.



(Reproduced from Gaywood et al, 2020)

Figure 4. Diagram of possible positional domains.

should be given to reflect and consider the implications of this and develop loving practices as part of a welcoming pedagogy. According to Natural Inclusion Theory (Rayner 2017), the fungi *actively* draw new fungi into a space they have created. It was important for the participant parents that this welcome enacted by the fungi should be embodied in the practitioners' attitude to their children. The implication is that there is a need to develop a Professional Love (Page 2018), which considers both the children's attachment needs and the concerns of their parents. By doing this, practitioners would act in a similar way to the fungi and dynamically offer a welcome for the children, which was visible and palpable for their parents too. When considering professional positionality Strekalova- Hughes (2017) work on intercultural sensitivity needs to be considered to guard against culturally vacuous classrooms. Open, safe spaces need to be offered to practitioners to consider their own culture and subsequently their intercultural sensitivity. Times of self-reflection will be vital in this process.

Understanding equity

The final element to be included in this discussion about professional positionality is the importance for staff to understand that, "*Equity and inclusion require more than treating everyone the same. There is an important difference between equity and equality*" (Early Education 2021). What is clear from the research findings is that the children were generally treated the same as any other child. So, for a child with cochlear implants, the input he received from the specialist cochlear implant team was the same as any other child who had cochlear implants. The child, who was selectively mute, accessed the specialist speech and language service, the same as any other child who was selectively mute and when faced with the mother's feedback that she felt her child was unloved, the staff at her ECEC setting protested that they treated her like all the other children. What was clear

was that refugee children needed to have their invisible needs seen and responded to. Zhang and Luo's (2016) research, which considered teacher's attitudes to rural migrant children in China, resonated with these research findings. The teachers expressed a strong belief that it was important to treat all the children equally (Zhang and Luo 2016). Zhang and Luo (2016) suggest that this attitude can perpetuate the inequality experienced by the children and families. In her investigation of the intercultural sensitivity of teachers in the United States, where there was a high proportion of refugee children, Strekalova-Hughes (2017) picks up a similar point and warns of the dangers of "*cultural-vacuum classrooms*" and "*culture-mute educational settings*", suggesting that they can perpetuate discrimination, bullying, poor attainment for refugee children and poor home-school relationships (Strekalova-Hughes 2017, 3). She notes that refugee children come from a variety of backgrounds so cannot be seen as a specific homogenous group in terms of their education and learning. These ideas about refugee children, and how they are conceptualised and positioned alongside how educators position themselves are pedagogical issues and require scrutiny to fully enact welcoming practices.

Conclusion

This article has reported on findings from a small-scale study conducted between December 2015 and October 2021 with four Syrian refugee children, their families and their early educators. The intricacies of conducting the research led to the development of the Pedagogy of Welcome. Since the study, concern for refugee and asylum-seeking children has only escalated with UNICEF (2024) reporting that at the end of 2022, about 43.3 million children worldwide had been displaced due to conflict and violence. The recent British governmental response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine was positive. A number of Ukrainians eligible for resettlement in Britain were uncapped and 3 routes were offered: the Ukraine Family Scheme, the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme and the Ukraine Extension Scheme (UK visas and immigration and Home Office 2022). However, in direct contrast is the rhetoric regarding refugees arriving on small boats (HM Government (2023a) PM Statement). In addition, the British Government continues to pursue the asylum partnership with Rwanda treaty (HM Government 2023b) even though widespread concern exists about the safety of this policy (Sparrow 2024). The war in Gaza has also exacerbated concerns about the displacement and threat to life of very young children (7 October 2023-present). In the UK, the war seems to have provided a lightning rod, galvanising opinion and causing deep lines of division to be drawn both politically and religiously. This article posits that the Pedagogy of Welcome brings much into this arena. Firstly, it offers a way for educators to use both micro-resistance and collaborative action (Archer 2024) to reframe negative narratives about refugee children. Secondly, this pedagogy creates a potential opportunity to respond positively to international conflict and work to bridge the divide between Judaism and Islam, offering a third and different way (Bhabha 1994). A way that is not merely a compromise or a midpoint between two galvanised positions, but a pathway that can be actively enacted creating a new space that respectfully builds on an ancient tradition of shared understanding of welcome, offering hope in troubled times.

Although this article outlines just one aspect of the Pedagogy of Welcome, it offers educators a positive research process that has been translated for praxis. A robust framework has been created for early educators to utilise to deeply interrogate their own professional positionality, enact more welcoming pedagogical practices, and include refugee children. Whilst this study has been concerned with the lived experience of refugee children, the Pedagogy of Welcome is deeply transferable to other marginalised children. The principles outlined are universally applicable to any group of children and their families who find themselves occupying a space where they are conceptualised as the Other (Bennett 2018). To develop this pedagogy, Natural Inclusion Theory (Rayner 2017) was utilised, which describes an ongoing living dynamic process. The Pedagogy of Welcome reflects this movement and dynamism. As practitioners engage with the processes outlined above, they will create their own version of welcome, for children who are often unwittingly marginalised. What has been set out is not a list of tasks to be completed, but rather an embodied, ethical, power-sensitive approach that is deeply challenging but will be able to provide living spaces of welcome.

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