

Promoting Social Inclusion of Susceptible Individuals through Street Educational Interventions: A Case Study with Undocumented Refugees¹

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Abstract

A central concern of postmodern societies is the consideration of the ways with which fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination are generally confronted. More precisely, the postmodern condition has resulted in the development of ambiguous, shifting and unstable collectivities as well as fractured and fluid identities. Within this context of non-linearity, globally manifested, new challenges concerning the social inclusion of vulnerable population groups, such as refugees, are coming more and more to the fore. Greece, being the gateway to Europe for a large portion of refugees, needs to find effective ways to respond to the dominant social changes resulting from the influx of refugees. Taking into consideration education's potential in promoting citizenship, belonging and embracing diversity as well as otherness, in this study we investigate how self-respect, self-consciousness, self-confidence, social acceptance and social relationships of undocumented refugees can be empowered through educational interventions. The aforementioned interventions were part of an educational street programme, called "Mobile School", implemented by the NGO PRAKSIS (Programmes of Development of Social Support and Medical Co-operation), in Patras, Greece. Evaluation sheets completed by the volunteers-educators after each intervention were collected during a four-month period in 2016-2017 and analyzed using content analysis. This paper reports on this data and attempts to illustrate the significance of educational interventions in favor of social inclusion of susceptible individuals. More specifically, it references interventions in a multilingual context,

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which focus on building a sustainable world that facilitate both refugee's self-development and citizenship.

Key Words

Migrant Crisis, Undocumented Refugees, Social Inclusion, Educational Intervention

Introduction

Nowadays, postmodern societies, which are characterized by ambiguity, instability and non-linearity (Bauman, 2013), deal with a variety of affairs, some of which are urgent. Concretely, the postmodern condition is associated with the sense of a multicultural society, where the ideas of identity, citizenship and social inclusion of vulnerable population groups, such as refugees, are in a constant consideration. The discourse about social inclusion initiates when democratic citizenship is at risk, because of society's failure to enhance the capacities of all its members, undermining the respect for them and making them feel "othered" (Saloojee, 2003, p. 9, 13). At this point educational interventions, which serve as a "counterpoint" to the aforementioned society's deficit, by supporting the empowerment and the maximization of human potential, are planned in order to respond to the differentiated needs of susceptible individuals (Buckmaster & Thomas, 2009, p. 30; Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010a). As far as the Greek society is concerned, some cracks on the promotion of social inclusion mainly concerning vulnerable population groups, such as refugees are detected. According to the statistics of the International Organization of Migration (IOM, 2017), 43.204 immigrants and refugees reached Europe via sea up to 23 April 2017, while Greece was the gateway to Europe for almost 5000 of them. This paper focuses on opportunities, provided for the social inclusion of recently arrived refugees in Greece. The parameters of the paper include a presentation of the literature outlining the reinforcing role of education towards the promotion of refugees' social inclusion. The findings of a recent study that looked at how educational interventions implemented on the street promote social inclusion of undocumented refugees will be presented, too.\

Literature Review

In this section, the topics, which will be reviewed, concern the sense of the term *undocumented refugee*, along with the issue of social inclusion with specific references to its benefits and the significance of education as a mediator to the procedure of susceptible individuals' social inclusion.

At first, according to the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (UN General Assembly, 1951; 1967; UNHCR, 2010).

The term *undocumented migration* refers to the movement that takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries. More precisely, according to the destination countries’ perspective, the aforementioned notion means entry, stay or work in a state without the necessary authorization or documents required under immigration regulations. On the other hand, from the sending country’s perspective, the term describes the condition of crossing an international boundary without a valid passport or travel document or without having fulfilled the administrative requirements for leaving the country (Perruchoud, 2004, p. 34).

In the context of a society that has been built via the concept of free shifting worldwide and that has encouraged migration flows (Butcher, Spoonley & Trlin, 2006, p. 6), the question of social inclusion is a very important issue. Though there have been considerable efforts by many states for the promotion of refugees’ social inclusion, the success of these remains doubtful. Refugees deal with different dimensions of social exclusion concerning employment, housing, location etc. Moreover, lack of citizenship, inadequacy in host country’s language along with the experience of racism and discrimination inhibit the procedure of social inclusion (Taylor, 2004).

Even if in the academic literature the concept of *social inclusion* is characterized by a diversity of definitions, in general, it is used in order to replace the senses of access and equity referred to under-represented groups in terms of socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability etc. Considering the notions of social justice and human potential, social inclusion is viewed as a participation or engagement and as a success through empowerment (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010b). In brief, social inclusion could be seen as equal to the concept of *social citizenship*, where equality of status is amplified into the community, through institutions as the education and the social services (Buckmaster & Thomas, 2009, p. 16).

Therefore, its focus is on the full involvement in a participatory dialogue within society, having the appropriate respect for human dignity and maximizing every human being’s potential. Furthermore, the promotion of full engagement is enhanced through the empowerment of (excluded) community members to be in touch with society again as contributing members of it (Egan, Butcher, & Ralph, 2008, p. 34). Consequently, individuals are included and not assimilated in a society, where cultural and individual diversity are recognized by strengthening the bridging of individual differences (Gidley, Hampson, Wheeler & Bereded-Samuel, 2010b).

As far as personal wellness is concerned, it seems that social inclusion promotes the enforcement of identity by building a movement of solidarity and establishing a common purpose (Saloojee, 2003, p. 11, 14). Moreover, through the creation of an inclusive learning environment, that encourages and values human dignity, a full personal development can be achieved concerning talents, skills and capacities (Wearing, 2011). A democratic inclusive participation in public society can be empowered, when active interventions are held in order to defend rights and ensure equality, inhibiting social distances and discrimination and promoting social proximity (Saloojee, 2003, p. 15, 17). It is worth bearing in mind that the pursuit of social inclusion boosts the enhancement of self-esteem, self-confidence and self-efficacy as personal achievement and expression are recognized, while the fulfillment of certain psychological needs brings about satisfaction. Last but not least, social inclusion gives to humans the ability to define and respect themselves by motivating them to engage in social affairs (Prilleltensky, 2010).

In the case of non-formal education and education in states of emergency, voluntary agencies are becoming increasingly involved in the provision of education, seeking to amplify or replace state provision to some extent (Gorman, 1984; Yonemura, Ochs & Chanda, 2012). Emergency programmes, targeting refugees and displaced or conflict-affected population, should be distinguished by “relevancy” and “quality”. The first term refers to meaningful knowledge and skills that cater for survival, livelihood, self-reliance and influence in the actual situation and environment, while the second one refers to knowledge and skills seen as useful in and by the community (Midttun, 2006). In case of emergency, the involvement of all children and young people in organized educational activities is especially important in order to help them overcome any psychological consequence of the emergency and assist their reintegration into social networks (Sinclair, 2002).

It is worth noting that refugees acknowledge education as a key to their future settlement and to their own or their children’s inclusion in the host society (Taylor, 2004). Specifically, education could be considered a “vehicle” of social inclusion as participation in structured activities gives undocumented minors or adults stability that they lack in the midst of an emergency. Then, refugees learn to cope with increased risks in an educational context, which provides them with a sense of normality and shields them from exploitation (Nicolai, 2003). Moreover, education’s potential may restore hope and support psychological healing from traumatic experiences and, at the same time, reinforce a sense of belonging through conversations about what has been left behind (Sinclair, 2002; 2001).

Last but not least, education prepares them to rebuild their own lives, their communities and wider social structures, looking constructively towards the future, while it also conveys life skills and values for health and prevention of HIV/AIDS, for gender equality, for peace-building, for responsible citizenship and environmental awareness (Buckland, 2005; Hek, 2005). Considering all these,

participatory educational approaches that boost learners' confidence through involvement in implementation of projects (like Mobile's school street educational programme in our case) induce more sustainable inclusive outcomes (Kagawa, 2005).

All in all, hardly any studies have been carried out about non formal education's potential in social inclusion of refugees in transit countries (Preston, 1991), such as Greece. Our research investigates the educational interventions, implemented on the street by an NGO, named PR.A.K.S.I.S. (Programmes of Development of Social Support and Medical Co-operation) which takes action in Greece –a country of both temporary and somewhat increasingly long-term settlement. These interventions are held mainly in open pedestrian areas near the Drop-In Centre of the NGO PRAKSIS, whose main aim is to record, inform unaccompanied minors and refer them to competent bodies and protection mechanisms. Some of the basic provisions of the Drop-In Centre are primary health care, legal counseling, psychosocial support, social interconnection with their families, internet access as well as essential necessities such as hygiene and clothing (www.praksis.gr). This study aims to investigate if and how street structured educational interventions can foster different aspects of social inclusion such as, valued recognition, human development, involvement and engagement, proximity. The term *valued recognition* refers to acknowledgement of the differences by respecting both individuals and groups. Human development means boosting the talents, skills and capacities of children and adults, through the provision of learning and developmental opportunities in order to live a valuable life. Then, involvement and engagement is equal to the right to be involved and engaged in the community through participation as global citizen. Lastly, *proximity* describes the sharing of common public areas such as parks and streets, where social interactions could be initiated resulting in the reduction of social distances (Saloojee, 2003).

Method

Participants

In this study, nine street educators, both key support staff and volunteers (seven women and two men) were interviewed. The sample was involved in the study optionally and anonymously. The age ranged from 23 to 32 years. The interviewees were either social workers or teachers, who participated in an educational street programme, called *Mobile School*, implemented by the NGO PRAKSIS. Non-probability sampling method that relies on data collection from population members, who are conveniently available to participate in study, was used (Cohen & Manion, 2013, pp. 113-114; Robson, 2007, p. 314).

Materials

The interview, which is one of the most commonly recognized forms of qualitative research methodology (Mason, 2003), was the research tool of the present study. More specifically, semi-structured interviews were carried out, as they support the development of trust, which is necessary for data collection that accurately reflects the experiences and perceptions of the research population. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews are characterized by greater freedom, as the interviewer may modify the sequence of questions, change the way they are formulated, explain or add details to them, but also choose how much time and attention will be devoted to the various examined issues (Robson, 2007, p. 321, 330).

Procedure

The research for this paper was carried out in 2017, at the Drop-In Centre for Unaccompanied Minors, which is located in Patras, Greece. The researchers, as volunteers of the NGO PRAKSIS, upon the approval with the supervisor of the NGO, got in touch with the participants and they informed them of the purpose of the study. The duration of the semi-structured interviews was approximately 20-30 minutes. After the gathering of interviewees' demographic data, open-ended questions were posed to the participants, with occasional follow-up questions in order to gain additional insights into the participant's responses. All the interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Transcriptions and summaries were used as data sources for the content analysis. Following the iterative coding process, four categories were delineated.

The Mobile School

Mobile School NPO is a Belgian organisation dedicated to empowering autonomous organisations (as the NGO PRAKSIS in our study), working with all children and youth for whom the street has become an important environment for living and learning throughout the world. The main purpose of the mobile school NPO is the discovery and the unlocking of the talents of street-connected children, so they can reacquire a positive self-image and can start to make conscious decisions about their own future. Recently, there are 45 mobile schools in 24 countries, spread across four continents: Latin America, Asia, Africa and Europe. Behind the methodology of the mobile school NPO is a tool, an extendable blackboard on wheels that comes with more than 300 educational panels ranging from literacy to street business, to health and hygiene. The curriculum targets the discovery and development of talents, interests, personal development and reflections of street children (www.mobileschool.org/nl).

Results

In this part, the results will be presented according to the categories, created based on the bibliography review.

Human development

From the interviewees' responses, it became clear that educational interventions of the "Mobile school" are learning and developmental opportunities for refugees, by stimulating their emancipation, nurturing skills, strengths, talents, possibilities and encouraging them to trust their distinct skills. In addition, they bring back to their minds the dreams made before the beginning of their travel.

Interviewee Observation/Response: "Through the educational activities, I feel that they discover a new aspect of themselves. There are a lot of minors who are desperate and give up their dreams to become doctors or lawyers, because of travel's difficulties. I think that Mobile School motivates them to redefine their goals." (23 year-old street educator)

By taking part in these interventions, they become more aware of themselves, developing the confidence, which permits them to take control of their life, make positive choices and set goals. Therefore, the Mobile School's methodology seems to play an important role in recognizing and developing people's potential, giving them the chance to consider the bright side of themselves and more freedom to live lives they value.

Interviewee Observation/Response: "They expose talents, which we can promote. They build their lacked self-confidence, as the Mobile school stimulates them to look at the other side of the coin and not only at their negative characteristics." (32 year-old street educator)

Proximity

Educational interventions taking place in public areas (such as parks and streets) provide opportunities for interactions among refugees, local inhabitants and population groups from different cultural background. The above groups may jointly get involved in street interventions, sharing the same space, co-deciding on the appropriate way of action in case of unexpected changes during the activity and cooperating towards a common goal.

Interviewee Observation/Response: "As mobile school's activities take place in squares or in the streets, where a lot of locals cross, we have seen passers-by who discuss and get involved with refugees." (23 year-old street educator)

Interviewee Observation/Response: “Mobile school gives the opportunity to refugees to interact with their peers from other cultures or countries. So, it facilitates the social inclusion of unaccompanied minors.” (31 year-old street educator)

Therefore, the first steps for a common living are made, as involvement in the Mobile school bridges social ties and reduces social distances between refugees and the others. Through this closer interplay, previous negative perceptions of susceptible individuals, which refer to a refugee’s profile as a non-existent or inferior person in society, are on the way to elimination.

Interviewee Observation/Response: “A lot of times refugees collaborate with greek children, who spend their time at the park. This helps in overcoming racist attitudes, which are present even if in childhood years.” (27 year-old street educator)

Valued Recognition

Participation in Mobile School’s activities constitutes a “vehicle” for the public’s awareness and for the acceptance of susceptible individuals and groups, like refugees. This means that refugee’s differences are recognised and that migration is not equated with unacceptable social behaviour (begging, steals, aggressiveness). Moreover, educational interventions gained approval by both young and older bystanders. The latter showed high regard to refugees, as they featured different aspects of themselves through their participation in street activities.

Interviewee Observation/Response: “As Mobile School’s activities take place in public areas, it gives the opportunity to locals to see the refugees in a different context, not only like those who get to the islands and destroy everything. I think that this helps minors to feel accepted by them.” (23 year-old street educator)

Interviewee Observation/Response: “Locals come closer to Mobile School, wonder about its usefulness and show positive interest.” (32 year-old street educator)

The attitude of citizens towards refugees is redefined, as through such educational activities different types of identities (e.g., the identity of “student”, “peer”, “friend” etc. and not only the identity of a refugee) are attributed to susceptible individuals. Therefore, society is moving towards a new consideration of a refugee as a fully participating citizen.

Interviewee Observation/Response: “They have the chance to come closer again with student’s identity, carried before the beginning of their travel and not feel that they are only refugees or homeless.” (31 year-old street educator)

Getting socialized

Based on the participants' responses, through its educational interventions the Mobile School appeared to be a setting for socializing. Namely, refugees opened themselves up to others, developed interpersonal relationships and felt as an accepted member of community. In other words, the first steps to socialization, which is a process that occurred through socializing, were made.

Interviewee Observation/Response: "They start being socialized, while before they didn't trust people. After the engagement in Mobile School, they opened up towards others with different cultures." (23 year-old street educator)

Interviewee Observation/Response: "Refugees participate in group activities. While he is used to be alone, he gains group spirit, he makes new friends and therefore the social inclusion is accomplished." (29 year-old street educator)

Gradually, the national restrictions, which may constitute an inhibitor for the development of social relationships between people, who belong in different communities, fade. Refugees are getting used to the idea of being a member of a supranational community.

Interviewee Observation/Response: "Step by step they gain a sense of belonging and they feel that they are part of a broader society. It's like you initiate and help them how to get involved. They start getting out from their narrow national context, becoming more open, developing "give and take" relationships with the community." (24 year-old street educator)

Conclusion

Qualitative data, retrieved from semi-structured interviews, were used in this study in order to illustrate how the social inclusion of susceptible individuals can be promoted through educational interventions, implemented on the street. The content analysis results provided clear support for a main effect of educational interventions on promoting social inclusion of refugees in terms of human dignity, social proximity, valued recognition and inclusive participation. As far as the first cornerstone of social inclusion is concerned, refugees are driven to the recognition and appreciation of their talents, skills, which brings about the reinforcement of self-confidence. Then, social proximity is achieved through the close interaction between locals and refugees, while the latter receive valued recognition. This means that educational interventions act as a tool for the public awareness, which results in the elimination of negative opinions towards refugees. Overall, street educational activities provide a space for socializing, where interpersonal relationships are developed.

The research focus of this study in such an important affair, as social inclusion, concerns the broader academic community. The main benefits, arisen after the reinforcement of refugees' social inclusion (such as the democratic inclusive

participation in public society, the reduction of social distances, the recognition of personal achievement and expression and the satisfaction, brought about the fulfillment of certain psychological needs) bring this certain issue to the fore (Prilleltensky, 2010; Saloojee, 2003, p. 15, 17; Wearing, 2011). The advantages of educational interventions in promoting the social inclusion of refugees, have also been supported by other researches, which regard education's role in providing a sense of normality (Nicolai, 2003), strengthening a sense of belonging (Sinclair, 2002; 2001) and boosting a participatory life in the new social context (Buckland, 2005; Hek, 2005).

In order to address some of the limitations regarding the generalizability of these findings in future research, it would be useful to examine different educational contexts where refugees are exposed in countries of temporary or permanent settlement. Larger samples could also provide deeper insights in the question investigated in this study. In addition, longitudinal researches are needed to examine the impact of non-formal educational interventions on reinforcement of different aspects of social inclusion for refugees, studying their own perspectives, other cultural contexts and other reception countries. Despite the aforementioned limitations, this study encourages the conduction of further researches, concerning the beneficial role of different types of non-formal education in the promotion of social inclusion.

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