

Techniques for Creating a Community for Learning



GROUP WORK

Research conducted by Harvard University found that refugee students settled easier in schools where “group work was the norm”. This gave students space to work together, chat, support each other and build relationships which provided extra support for them in their new community.²⁶ Teachers should choose groups carefully and select students who might get on well with the new student to help form friendships in the classroom.



FOCUS ON INCLUSION

Harvard University researchers found that the decisions made by school staff regarding classroom culture, school ethos and curriculum adaptions often determined whether new refugee students were included or excluded.²⁷ UNESCO found that when practical adaptions were not made, it impacted the quality of education for refugees and their feelings of belonging within the school.²⁸



STRONG RAPPORT WITH TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF

Getting to know your new students is vital to them settling into the school. Finding time to ask questions in class, speaking to support staff to find out about specific needs, and having conversations during breaks will help the student feel valued and important in your classroom. It may also help explain behaviour issues and challenges they face in class.



ENCOURAGE EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Extra-curricular activities can help students to utilise an existing skill or hobby or develop new ones. They also give space to meet new people outside of the classroom, learn English in a non-formal environment, and to gain a sense of self-worth outside of academic classes.

26 UNHCR. (2022) ‘Orientation Programs and Processes’. Retrieved from: <https://www.unhcr.org/handbooks/ih-placement-reception-orientation/orientation-programs-and-processes>.

27 Lander, J. (2020). ‘Belonging’, Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/ed/20/05/belonging>.

28 UNESCO. (2019). Inclusion of Refugees in National Education Systems. *Global Education Monitoring Report*.



CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG STAFF & STUDENTS

To meaningfully resettle refugee children, staff and students must show “respect and appreciation of diversity and a willingness to examine one’s own cultural values and beliefs”. Most importantly, they must understand that “one culture is not superior to another”.²⁹



ETHOS OF RESPECT THROUGHOUT SCHOOL

Schools should embed an ethos of respect through assemblies, mottos, weekly aims for students and staff, celebrating key figures from other cultures, and awareness of religious and cultural holidays—also by actively teaching and learning about refugees. There are lots of ready-made resources online from UNHCR, the United Nations, RefugeeWeek, YouTube, and more.



SCHOOL BEAUTIFICATION PROJECTS

Staff and students can take on creative, hands-on projects to build a sense of belonging and community. Examples could include designing a school garden, making display boards, completing pieces of artwork like a school mural, or redesigning an area of the school like the library to make it a welcoming place for students to spend time.



RELATIONSHIP WITH FAMILY/CAREERS

Schools should seek to work with families to help them access services and support them where they can. Some schools have dedicated an hour a week to teaching English to parents and family members, others have welcomed families to the school for tours. Additional ideas could include afterschool meet and greets, fun days on the weekends, family bake-sales, and charity fundraisers.

29 Ballard-Kang, J. L. (2017). Using Culturally Appropriate, Trauma-Informed Support to Promote Bicultural Self-Efficacy Among Resettled Refugees: A Conceptual Model. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 0(0), 1-20.