

# Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice: Supporting Teachers in Host Countries & Resettlement Contexts to Meet the Needs of Refugee Students

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<b>Teacher Profile</b>	Host community teachers
<b>Topic</b>	Teacher professional development

## DESCRIPTION OF CRISIS-SPECIFIC CHALLENGE

Research indicates that high-quality teachers in every classroom are a key factor in children's learning (Darling-Hammond 2000). This is especially true for refugee children resettled to a third country or living in a neighboring host country, who are often behind in grade-level knowledge, are working to master a new language, and are tasked with healing from past trauma while also acclimating to a new country and culture (Taylor and Sidhu 2012). Exacerbated by a current shortage of about 110,000 teachers in the United States (VOA 2019), many refugee students find themselves in classrooms with poorly prepared or underprepared teachers. Most U.S. educators have little or no specialized training to work with refugees. The Carey Institute for Global Good seeks to address this gap by creating a community of practice, an intentional and dynamic learning space for dialog, reflection, and exchange of resources and practices for U.S. educators focused on refugee education (Storchi 2015; NCTE 2011).

## BRIEF OVERVIEW

The Refugee Educator Foundations of Practice pilot is a grant-funded US-based project currently being implemented in three diverse US states: Arizona, New York, and Washington. While all three of these states have received large numbers of resettled refugees over the past decade and are currently facing teacher shortages, educational funding and policy structures create unique contexts for teaching and learning in each state (see Table 1 below) providing for useful comparative analysis of project impact and scalability. These states were selected for their diversity of refugee communities, student outcomes, and teacher professional learning needs.

The target population for the project is educators of refugee students, primarily classroom teachers but also including paraeducators, classroom aides, and instructional coaches. The Carey Institute is working with a total participant group of 315 teachers, divided into three cohorts of approximately 105 educators each for the 2019-2021 pilot study. An outside evaluator is helping to track outcomes and impact over this duration.

The project consists of two phases: a 12-week facilitated online course followed by six months of continued dialog and coaching within a community of practice. Refugee education experts, chiefly classroom teachers themselves, are selected from each state for each of the three cohorts to facilitate the course and offer coaching after the course. These facilitator/coaches participate in an online coaching course and a face-to-face workshop prior to leading their cohort. They are supported through biweekly discussions with each other and the Refugee Educator Academy Program Manager at the Carey Institute. The course and coaching provide educators with space and structure to reflect on practice, share resources, and critically engage with content in order to increase their competence, confidence, commitment, and connectedness in their role as refugee educators.

Utilizing the Carey Institute's Sustainable Learning Framework, we aim to support educators in:

- understanding foundational concepts such as culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, social-emotional learning, trauma informed practice, curriculum and materials design, scaffolding, and differentiation as they relate specifically to working with refugee students and families;
- demonstrating growing competency through reflective dialog, micro-credentialing and building of e-portfolios;

- making use of effective, research-based strategies and methods in their classrooms (or teaching/learning context);
- feeling increased confidence and self-efficacy specific to their work with refugee students; and
- developing a sense of belonging to a community of educators committed to meeting the academic and social-emotional needs of refugee children/youth.



Figure 1: Micro-credential badges. There are currently four available teacher micro-credentials in the refugee educator stack created by the Carey Institute for Global Good.

Table 1. U.S. Educational Contexts for Refugee Education

State	Number of refugees resettled since 2008 <sup>1</sup>	2018 average per-pupil spending <sup>2</sup>	Newcomer / English Learner Programs & Structures	English Learner Graduation Rates (Sanchez 2017)
Arizona	29,839	\$8,131	Prior to Fall 2019, 4-hour Structured English Immersion (SEI) program mandated for all English Learners; very few newcomer programs or schools; bilingual education programs severely limited by state law	18%
New York	39,376	\$18,665	Program options include bilingual, dual language, and English as a New Language (ENL); additional programming for SIFE (Students with interrupted formal education); ENL program includes a co-teaching model with classes co-taught by an ENL and content area teacher, but also incorporates push-in and pull-out approaches in many contexts	37.1%
Washington	27,056	\$10,395	Program models include dual language, bilingual, sheltered instruction, English as a Second Language (ESL), and newcomer programs	53.8%
USA (total)	663,674	\$12,526 (national average)	Language proficiency testing required for students with home languages other than English and appropriate provision of services based on assessment results mandated, but services vary by state (no federally mandated or preferred programs)	63%

<sup>1</sup> Data for the period from October 1, 2008 through September 30, 2019 (Refugee Processing Center 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Data retrieved from Education Week (2019). Note on site: "As part of each state's overall school finance grade, *Quality Counts 2018* looks at per-pupil spending adjusted for regional cost differences across states. It captures factors such as teacher and staff salaries, classroom spending, and administration, but not construction or other capital spending."

## EVIDENCE AND OUTCOMES

Currently, the project's first cohort has 100 educators participating from more than 70 schools or district offices. We will have final qualitative and quantitative data to share in 2021, with data analysis and reporting from our external evaluators who are using a mixed-methods approach to document both short-term and longitudinal outcomes of the initiative. Primarily, we will be looking for shifts in attitudes and practices related to refugee education specifically around aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed practices, psychosocial development, and curriculum and assessment. This fall we are gathering preliminary data including quantitative data generated by our learning management system and gathered from discussion posts, meetings, surveys, and micro-credentials as well as qualitative data from feedback surveys, assignments, e-portfolios, community discussions, interviews, and focus groups.

Although it is premature to present conclusive findings, within our inaugural cohort we see a high engagement rate with 589 original posts in discussions and 144 resources shared during the first six weeks of the course. Platform statistics indicate that 88% of enrolled participants are progressing through course pages, videos, and quizzes. Facilitators report regular attendees at online and face-to-face meetings, and participants indicate value added and note the ways they are using and sharing information from this community of practice in their classrooms, schools, and districts. For example, one participant posted, "I always thought that I had a good relationship with my students but after watching the videos I can only say I am missing a lot. I need to slow down. I have an EL (English Learner) student who pops into my class three times a week who I had last year. I feel bad for I really don't know much about him. The questions in the modules are some I will be taking with me next I see him." Another participant reported in a feedback survey: "I liked the articles shared about funds of knowledge and I collected them to share with teachers and staff at my school."

## LIMITATIONS, CHALLENGES, AND/OR LESSONS LEARNED

Challenges include competing demands on teachers' time. While we have worked with each of the three states to ensure accredited professional development

hours for required continuing education requirements and secured stipends for teachers in one Arizona district, we continue efforts to secure resources to incentivize and sustain engagement.

Additionally, we are working to better differentiate the program for our diverse participant group. Participants include novice and experienced teachers, teachers with expertise in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students, those without formal training in this area, and those working in pull-out, inclusion, and mainstream classroom settings. While we have offered a variety of materials and a variety of pathways to meet these differing learners' needs, we are learning with cohort one and plan to revise the course for cohort two. This is truly an iterative and responsive project.

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## LINKS

- Website: <https://careyinstitute.org/programs/education/refugee-educator-academy/>
- Introduction video for the course: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K\\_4JjEie6Qg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_4JjEie6Qg)
- Project related micro-credentials: [https://microcredentials.digitalpromise.org/explore?page\\_size=24&page=1&organization\\_name=Carey%20Institute%20for%20Global%20Good](https://microcredentials.digitalpromise.org/explore?page_size=24&page=1&organization_name=Carey%20Institute%20for%20Global%20Good)

## TEACHER PROFILES

### Profile 1

One of the teachers who has been most active and outspoken in the community thus far is an English as a New Language high school teacher in Phoenix, Arizona. This educator has been a classroom teacher working with refugees for more than 15 years and holds a master's degree. She has also served as an English Language Fellow through a U.S. State Department Program for nine months in Peru. Retired once, she has returned to the classroom to work with English language learners. Despite her extensive experience with culturally and linguistically diverse students, she noted on an introductory survey that she feels only "somewhat" prepared to teach refugee students. She indicated her top three reasons for enrolling in this project as a (1) desire to reflect on her work as a refugee educator and improve outcomes, (2) develop

skills and/or create materials to support this work, and (3) increase her knowledge regarding refugee education. Six weeks into the course she posted:

"...these modules are so eye-opening and cause me to think and reflect greatly. I believe, as a district, we do not have enough in place to help teachers understand Social Emotional Learning and Trauma. Being located at a campus with a high refugee population, I see a need for more training of our teachers...I am sending articles and information from this course to our new district coordinator and pleading for our PD to focus more on education of refugees next school year... Fortunately, she is willing to look into this..."

Clearly, this educator seeks to advocate for refugee students and improve programmatic offerings and teacher preparation at both her school and in her district to better meet refugee student needs.



Photo 1: Washington state refugee educators collaborating during a face-to-face workshop

## Profile 2

Another participant in our first cohort offers quite a different profile. This individual serves as a paraeducator in a large, diverse high school outside of Seattle, WA. She has been at the school for two years, and she supports refugee students in math and English classes as a teacher aide. Fluent in Arabic and originally from Iraq, this educator is an asset to her community and a role model for the students at her school. She serves as a bridge between home and

school for many families, and loves what she does. Currently she draws from her own personal experience and from her knowledge of local communities as she does not yet have much formal training or coursework in education. Her aspirations include returning to school to become a teacher one day, and she is very glad to be part of this pilot project which affords her a unique learning opportunity alongside her teacher colleagues. She is driven by knowledge that “education enlightens refugees, gives them knowledge and skills to live productive and independent lives.”



Photo 2: Washington state refugee educators collaborating during a face-to-face workshop

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