Education Justice Volunteering Reflection for Passover

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to volunteer for education justice, alongside the Repair the World and HIAS #SupportforRefugees Passover Campaign.

Education justice refers to the belief that all students should have access to equitable educational opportunities regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic background, or other differentiating factors. Today you may have been volunteering with students, or maybe just in the spaces where students and other young children spend their time. Although you may not have had the chance to work directly with refugees in your volunteering, we’d like to take a moment to reflect on the challenges everyone faces in accessing educational services, and highlight the ways in which the experiences of a refugee are likely to exacerbate those challenges.

Refugees moving to the United States become a part of the systems that already exist, including our educational system. When we work to improve the educational programming in our communities, we increase access not only for those who currently reside here, but for those who will join our communities in the future.

As you wind down your volunteer experience today, we encourage you to take a few moments to choose one or more options from the resources below and reflect on the accompanying guiding questions. Discuss with a partner or in a small group, and share what these bring up for you, as well as how they connect to your experiences today.

Option 1 - Conversations and Comments Surrounding Refugee Experiences in Post-Secondary Education


Background
In recent years, New Zealand has served as a country for refugees to find relocation. These quotes are from New Zealand’s post-secondary educational service programs, known as Tertiary Educational Institutions (TEIs,) Although these experiences are not from refugees who have been resettled in the United States, they share many common experiences.

Source
“...In quite a lot of cases, students who come to this country, sometimes with no previous experience in education, sometimes who are not literate in their own language let alone in English, and who are starting to learn a new language having never learned another language before.

So for some of those students it might be two years of full-time study before you could even say that they’ve reached the elementary level... and it’s assuming they are in the right mental space to study, and that they’re not still heavily traumatised by their experiences.

So it’s a minefield really. There’s a whole range of other stuff going on.”

-Teaching Staff Member, South Island TEI (April 29, 2011)
“I sometimes feel no one really understands me. Like I will wake up and find it is all a dream. Sometimes in class I spend the whole day worrying about my mum who is working two jobs, one in a supermarket and as a cleaner at night. I have no computer at home so I never get to finish my assignments in time, I worry about my English, and I don’t know who I can talk to without getting judged.

I am keeping to myself a lot these days. Other students think I am being rude. But they don’t know what I am going through.”

-Refugee student who wished not to be identified, Johnstone & Kimani (2010)

“We are quiet, so people don’t want to speak to us.”

-22-year-old male from Ethiopia (April 6, 2011)

Guiding Questions

1. People who have grown up in the United States and are familiar with American culture often have difficulty accessing services, whether because of pre-existing trauma or scarcity of options and resources. What are some of the challenges that these individuals may face in accessing services?
2. Think now about some of the traumas and obstacles that refugees face as they settle in the United States. How might these traumas and obstacles exacerbate the challenges that underserved Americans face under the best of circumstances?
3. What are some of the specific challenges that refugees might face in accessing educational services and exercising their rights to an education?
4. How might we take specific action to address those challenges specific to refugees through our volunteering and service?

Option 2 - Selection from Pirkei Avot Chapter 5, Mishna 18

Background
Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of Our Fathers, is a compilation of Jewish text from the Mishnaic period (approximately 10 - 220 CE.)
This selection is from Chapter 5, Mishna 18.

Source
“There are four types of students (lit., among those who sit before the Sages)--a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sifter. The sponge absorbs everything. The funnel brings in on this [side] and brings out on the other. The strainer lets out the wine and retains the lees. The sieve lets out the flour dust and retains the fine flour.”

Guiding Questions

1. Of the four types of students identified in the passage, which one do you identify most with? Are there moments when you have identified with one of the other types? What causes you to shift among the different types?
2. We often talk about different types of learning styles in education. In what ways do learning styles play out in more privileged communities? In less privileged ones?
3. How might a person’s experiences or cultural background affect whether others classify them as a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, or a sifter?
4. In what ways can our education justice volunteer work support all who seek an education, regardless of their learning style or experiences?
Option 3 - Drawings by Syrian Refugee Children Living in Turkish Refugee Camps

Excerpts from: “Young Refugee Children: Their Schooling Experiences in the United States and in Countries of First Asylum,” a study conducted by the Migration Policy Institute, October 2015.

Background
In 2012, a group of researchers traveled to Turkish refugee camps to study over 300 elementary-aged refugee children from Syria, with the goal of assessing their overall mental health. Of those children surveyed, 79% had experienced someone die in their family, and over 60% had experienced a stressful life event where they thought that someone else was in great danger—seeing someone get kicked at, shot at, or physically hurt. 44% of those had experienced five or more of these stressful events, and 19% had experienced seven or more of them. 45% of those surveyed experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, which is more than 10 times the rate observed among other children worldwide.

Source
In addition to the surveys, the researchers instructed the children to “draw a picture of a person, a picture of war, and a picture of peace.” No further instructions were given. The following drawings are examples of each one.

Option A: Take a look at the pictures on the next page and discuss them.

Option B: Before viewing the pictures on the next page, please use the space below and a pencil/pen to draw your own version of the three pictures as stated above: “a picture of a person, a picture of war, and a picture of peace.” After you have drawn your pictures, view the pictures drawn by refugee children and compare them with your own.
A picture of a person:

A picture of war:
A picture of peace:

Guiding Questions

1. We often talk about the need to provide basic necessities—food, water, shelter—to refugees. After basic needs are met, we then focus on programs like access to medical care and education. Rarely do we discuss support for mental health. Might conversations surrounding this need to become more at the forefront of refugee discussions? Why or why not?

2. As we have discussed, refugees (as well as all who reside in the United States) benefit from systems that exist here. In what ways can we improve access to mental health support, specifically for children? Are there ways we can incorporate this in our educational system?

Again, thank you for participating in these conversations today. If you’d like to learn more about the Repair the World and HIAS #SupportforRefugees Passover campaign, please don’t hesitate to check us out at www.werepair.org/passover and www.turn-the-tables.org.
Food Justice Volunteering

Reflection for Passover

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to volunteer for food justice, alongside the Repair the World and HIAS #SupportforRefugees Passover Campaign.

Food justice refers to fairness and equality for all living things and systems that surround food from before a seed is planted until after food is disposed. Although you may not have had the chance to work directly with refugees in your volunteering today, we’d like to take a moment to reflect on the challenges everyone faces in food justice, and highlight the ways in which a refugee’s experiences are likely to exacerbate those challenges. Refugees moving to the United States become a part of the systems that already exist, including the food system. When we work to improve the food system in our communities, we increase access not only for those who currently reside here, but for those who will join our communities in the future.

As you close your volunteer experience today, we encourage you to take a few moments to choose one or more options from the resources below and reflect on the accompanying guiding questions. Discuss with a partner or in a small group, and share what these bring up for you, as well as how they connect to your experiences today.

Option 1 - Culturally Appropriate Food

What is Culturally Appropriate Food?

“Food sovereignty is the right of peoples, communities, and countries to define their own agricultural, labor, fishing, food and land policies, which are ecologically, socially, economically and culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances. It includes the true right to food and to produce food, which means that all people have the right to safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food and to food-producing resources and the ability to sustain themselves and their societies.”

Guiding Questions

- What does the phrase “culturally appropriate food” mean?
- How might it differ for different populations? Industrialized vs. third-world country? Urban vs. rural?
- Why is culturally appropriate food so important?

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De’ah 250:1

The Shulchan Arukh is the most widely accepted legal code in the Jewish tradition. It was compiled by Yosef Caro in 16th century Land of Israel. The section Yoreh De’ah includes laws pertaining to Jewish dietary practices, mourning, the land of Israel, and more. The following excerpt talks about how and what we ought to provide to those in need.

How much do we give to a poor person? Enough to satisfy what the person is lacking. In what way? If the person is hungry, they feed them... Such is done with each and every individual, according to what they lack.

For a person who expects a loaf of bread, they give that person a loaf of bread. For a person who needs dough, they give them dough. ... For a person who expects a warm loaf of bread, they give that person a warm loaf, and a cold loaf for someone who expects a cold loaf. For a person who expects that someone will feed them their food by putting the food directly into their mouths, they feed them by putting the food directly into their mouths.

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1 “Food Sovereignty: A Right For All, Political Statement of the NGO/CSO Forum for Food Sovereignty,” Rome, June 2002

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Guiding Questions

- What does this text suggest is the basic standard for how we provide people with food?
- How can this text be applied to our understanding of culturally appropriate food?
- Why do you suppose it’s important to feed “each and every individual, according to what they lack”? Do you agree with this approach?
- Are there any limits to how far you would take this? (e.g., how extreme could your hospitality be before it went beyond the limits?)

Syrian refugee kids can't stomach Toronto hotel food

Parents miss cooking for themselves and say children can't adjust to North American cuisine.
Metro Toronto | Gilbert Ngabo and Jessica Smith Cross | Tue Feb 02 2016

Ahmed Al Kafri opens up a drawer in his hotel room to reveal food he’s bought for his family. Then, he holds up a stack of receipts to show how much it’s cost him.

As a newly arrived refugee from Syria, every penny is precious — but it’s either buy packages of pita and olives or watch his kids go hungry.

Al Kafri and his family are among the hundreds of government-sponsored refugees staying at the Toronto Plaza Hotel as they search for more permanent housing. The upside is their food is provided by the hotel and paid for by the government. The downside is his kids are having trouble digesting it or refusing to eat it at all.

It’s among the top complaint coming from thousands of refugees stuck in hotels. Now, they have an ally.

The Syrian Canadian Foundation — made up of Syrians who’ve been in the country for many years — is working with hotels in a bid to bring in new chefs to help adapt menus to refugees’ needs.

In some cases, th[is] means moving away from things like hamburgers and chicken wings and towards foods that are more commonly served in Syria — saucy vegetables, green beans and stew.

Bayan Khatib, a member of the Syrian [F]oundation, remembers the culinary culture shock she experienced all too well. She came to Toronto from Syria more than 20 years ago and remembers hating pretty much everything she ate at first.

“Everything tasted weird, and I didn’t like it at all,” Khatib said. “I distinctly remember thinking ketchup was a horrid invention.”

Eventually, the troubles will ease, she said.

“Of course you get used to it,” she said. “I still love Syrian food but I love pizza too now.”

But, until then, the refugees deserve a helping hand.

Guiding Questions

- How does this article bring the value of culturally appropriate food into a new light?
- What are some of the potential consequences of not providing culturally appropriate food for refugees?
- What is the role of the host country in providing culturally appropriate food?

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Option 2 - Leaving Home in Haste

Samira’s Story[^3]:

This story comes from the webpage of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which protects and assists people fleeing conflict or violence.

“My husband was killed during the fighting and I had to leave my village with my four children. I was five months pregnant and it took me two months to get to this shelter. Throughout the entire journey my children and I were bitterly cold and hungry.

After my husband was killed, my first priority was to ensure my children’s safety. I was five months pregnant. We were fleeing for our lives and weren’t able to grab anything from our home. All we had was the clothes on our backs. It took us about two months to reach the relative safety of this place. The journey was terrible – a constant battle against hunger and the cold. Whenever it rained the only place for me and my four children to take shelter was under the trees.

Once we reached this area – where a lot of displaced people are staying – I went into labour. I was only in my seventh month of pregnancy. I had no access to a hospital or trained medical staff. The other women here had to help me give birth...

*Name has been changed to protect identities.

Guiding Questions

- What are some of the difficulties, as highlighted in the story, that refugees face, relating to leaving their homes in haste?
- If you had to leave your home without warning, and could take only what you could carry, what is would you take?

Exodus 12: 33-34 & 39

The Egyptians urged the people on, impatient to have them leave the country, for they said, "We shall all be dead." So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls wrapped in their cloaks upon their shoulders... And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had taken out of Egypt, for it was not leavened, since they had been driven out of Egypt and could not delay; nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

- [Jewish Publication Society (1985)]

Guiding Questions

- What do you think the text means when it says “We shall all be dead”?
- What items would you bring if you were fleeing from home? Would food be on the list? Why or why not?
- How does the story of the Israelites’ exodus from Egypt relate to the plight of modern day refugees?

Option 3 - The Dignity of Choosing Your Own Food

Numbers 21:5
And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why did you make us leave Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no bread and no water, and we have come to loathe this miserable food."
- Jewish Publication Society (1985)

The 'miserable food' that the text refers to is the manna that was provided for the Israelites in the desert. Rashi, a medieval commentator, says that manna had a perfect balance of nutrition, so the Israelites must not have been complaining that they were not properly nourished. Rabbi Laura Geller⁴ presents the idea that the Israelites may have gotten tired of the food because it was the same every day, less varied than a diet of bread and water.

Guiding Questions

● How would you react if you had to eat the same food for every meal? How does your reaction compare to the reaction of the Israelites?
● What does this text teach us about the role of food?
● What is the importance of being able to choose your own food and eating a variety of food?

Food Vouchers Give Syrian Refugees A Taste Of Home⁵
World Food Programme | Jane Howard | February 12th, 2013

HATAY—A young Syrian mother rocks the cradle of her one-month old baby boy Yusuf, born in exile in Turkey. Aziza now lives in a tent in a refugee camp near the Syrian border after fleeing the civil war, but her thoughts are never far away from home...

Aziza is one of more than 20,000 Syrians living in Turkey who receive electronic vouchers to buy food to feed their families.

WFP and the Turkish Red Crescent provide them with an “e-card” which is credited with 80 Turkish Lira (US$45) per person per month which she can spend in 15 different shops in the nearby town of Yayladagi...

“I like it because now I can cook exactly the same things we used to cook in Syria,” she said. “Coming from a village, we used to grow our own vegetables, and now we have the opportunity to buy things that I used to grow and make the same type of food that we used to cook back home…”

In the nearby town of Altinozu, former chef and restaurant owner Hossein Mohammad struggled on a crutch to shop with his wife... "We came here to seek medical treatment – not because we wanted to leave Hama," he said. He too said he appreciates the fact that the e-card system means he can cook what he wants, when he wants to, for his family of 12.

Guiding Questions

● What kind of comfort can food bring to someone who is seeking refuge?
● Why is it important for refugees to be able to choose the food that they cook and eat?
● What might be the pros and cons of the 'e-card' system? How might it fit into a larger picture of food justice for refugees?

⁴ http://www.reformjudaism.org/manna-heaven-what-could-be-better-0
⁵ http://www.wfp.org/stories/food-vouchers-give-syrian-refugees-taste-home