

# *Teaching Refugee Children*

**[www.teachingrefugeechildren.com](http://www.teachingrefugeechildren.com)**

© 2018, H el ene van Oudheusden

Cover drawing: Sophia Mariola

ISBN 9789081440011

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of H el ene van Oudheusden, Apollo Books. For information: [info@helenevanoudheusden.nl](mailto:info@helenevanoudheusden.nl)

By the same author:

Connecting values, Multicultural guidance in primary education

(available in Dutch only)

**Hélène van Oudheusden**

**TEACHING  
REFUGEE  
CHILDREN**

*A Hero's Journey*

Apollo Books



*For Habiba*

*Your courage and radiance  
are pure empowerment*

I met Habiba during my voluntary work. She is 11 years old and has been waiting in a refugee camp for two years. Habiba wants to go to school but there are no teachers. She taught herself six languages to make the most of her waiting time.

# INHOUD

Acknowledgments	9
Foreword	11
PART 1	
1. Self-care when teaching refugee children	15
1.1 Introduction	15
1.2 First take care of yourself, teacher	16
1.3 Energy flows where attention goes	24
1.4 Self-reflection when teaching refugee children	25
1.5 Keeping up to date	30
PART 2	
2. Care of refugee children	35
2.1 Introduction	35
2.2 Social-emotional learning (SEL)	35
2.3 Maslow pyramid – the hierarchy of human needs	36
2.4 Which psychological effects refugee children are facing?	37
2.5 Effects of trauma in the classroom	41
PART 3	
3. Trauma-sensitive teaching	44
3.1 Introduction	44
3.2 The Power of Community	45
3.3 Phases in creating a class community	46
3.4 Say Hello - Say Goodbye Exercises – Rites of Passage	49
3.5 Tools for trauma-sensitive teaching	51
3.6 Special attention for unaccompanied minors	65
3.7 Summary of do's for powerful guidance of refugee children	66
3.8 What we sometimes do not think about...	68

PART 4	
4. The Hero's Journey – Rites of Passage	71
PART 5	
5. Refugee children advising teachers	98
PART 6	
6. Refugee teachers advising teachers	102
PART 7	
7. Universal values in practice	106
7.1 Introduction	106
7.2 Connection	106
7.3 Trust	111
7.4 Compassion	114
7.5 Exercises for teachers only	116
7.6 Do's for school directors	119
PART 8	
8. Mindfulness for Refugee Children	122
8.1 Introduction	122
8.2 Advantages of mindfulness	123
8.3 When do you use mindfulness exercises?	123
8.4 Breathe in, breathe out	124
8.5 One minute mindfulness	124
8.6 Five to ten minutes mindfulness	125
8.7 Ten minutes mindfulness	134
Inspirational reading and watching	136
Sources	139
Extra for readers	143
About the author	144





# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I saw the many dinghies with refugee children arriving on Greek shores I could not believe my eyes. There is a strange physical and emotional reaction when you witness boat landings. The adrenaline rush is sky high because you never know whether all people on board are safe. You don't even know whether to laugh or cry. The cries of children and their parents will stay in my heart forever. Cries of joy and of sorrow. For having left their homes and loved ones behind, for their relief about a (mostly) safe landing, trusting that a new life could begin by entering Europe. For every refugee child I met and for every child that tries his best to adapt to a new life in a strange country I wished to write this book. Thank you for allowing me into your world...

The writing process was a truly joint-effort. I could not have done this without the support, inspiration and love of many people. We are truly all part of a long chain of helpers along the route refugee children are taking.

With my deep gratitude for your contribution to this book I would like to thank: *Petra Martina Reichmann, Michael Lambert, Joseph Campbell Foundation, Cees van Oudheusden, Joke van Oudheusden, Hanneke Steenbergen-Geurtz, Sophia Mariola, Esther Kraaijenbrink, Sharda Jainandunsing, Dionisis Pavlou and all dedicated teachers for your willingness to share your experience and ideas on educating refugee children with colleagues from all over the world!*



# FOREWORD

*“This isn’t work, it’s my passion. I feel so grateful that I am allowed to teach refugee children.”*

This is what refugee teachers tell me, time and again. The stamina of refugee teachers and their dedication to their pupils constantly amazes me. No matter where a refugee teacher is based I notice the same love for children and the same thankfulness for their job. When you love your job this much there is always the possibility that you might overlook to take care of yourself as a person and a teacher. Therefore this book starts with a self-care chapter to support you daily.

Currently there are over 20 million displaced children worldwide (UNHCR). To empower refugee children in their daily challenging lives it is important to help them develop sustainable self-worth, self-confidence and persistence. This social-emotional learning (SEL) is the foundation for a successful education in refugee communities and in schools. This way a child can view her future from inner strength and see all the possibilities available to her.

Teaching Refugee Children offers you theory, tools and exercises to support yourself and your pupils in social-emotional learning. We will look at the education and guidance of refugee children from a psychological and spiritual point of view. It is the perspective of transforming your life to be reborn into a new life. The important work of Joseph Campbell, mythologist and author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was one of the inspirations for this book. *The Hero’s Journey* describes the inner (and in the case of refugees outer) journey of life. The schema is adapted to the lives of refugee children and their teachers, to support you to guide the child in his personal hero’s journey.

Since 2006 I have provided social-emotional learning for refugee children in the Netherlands. We have welcomed children from over 125 countries into schools. Each with their own story, needs, wishes and dreams for the future. In 2015/2016 I supported the local community on Lesbos, Greece, receiving over 750.000 mainly Syrian and Afghan refugees wishing to build a new future in Europe. Following I have organised study visits to Lesbos to educate Dutch teachers in trauma-sensitive teaching, with the aim of engaging them in the plight of refugee children when they enter Europe for the first time. Once you have witnessed a part of the journey these children make, it is easier for you to tailor your lessons for refugee childrens' needs.

During my field work in the Netherlands and in Greece I met dedicated, inspiring (refugee) teachers doing the best they could in challenging circumstances. This inspired me to write a book especially for the numerous teachers educating migrant and refugee children all over the world. Whether you are a volunteer teacher in a makeshift school in a refugee community or are educating refugee children in their new homeland, this book is for you. Its aim is to support you in your important work: raising a new generation.

***Hélène van Oudheusden***

Note, in the context of this book 'child' is used to mean children up to 18 years of age.

**TIP | Visit [www.teachingrefugeechildren.com](http://www.teachingrefugeechildren.com) for extra tools, exercises and all weblinks in this book.**

# PART 1

*"...The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind..."*

**Kahlil Gibran, The Prophet**

## **TAGS**

self-care | recharge your batteries | positive teaching  
self-reflection | burnout | Me Time | personal motivation  
international treaties



# 1 | SELF-CARE WHEN TEACHING REFUGEE CHILDREN

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Working with refugee children can take its toll on your teaching skills as well as your personal life. The stories of the children can sometimes be hard to bear, especially when it is challenging for you to manage the contrast of your privileged life with the hardships of the children and parents that you are supporting on a daily basis. Regularly teachers need to take time off work to heal themselves because they have spent too much of their empathy on their pupils, forgetting to take care of themselves along the way. You cannot pour from an empty cup!

Compassion and empathy are much needed virtues in life. However, it is always best to share compassion rather than giving it away. When sharing you are advised to be compassionate and kind to yourself first. Just as on a plane when you must first put the oxygen mask on yourself and then on your child.

*self-care* In this chapter self-care is explored on different levels, enabling you to enhance your well-being through self-reflection and by implementing practical tools.

**TIP** | *Everything that applies to regular education, also applies to educating refugee children. You just need to add even more warmth and compassion. Your pedagogical approach is more important than didactics in educating refugee children.*

## 1.2 FIRST TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, TEACHER

*“Know thyself”*

Γνώθι σεαυτόν

Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece

As a teacher of refugee children you will be confronted with the psychological and social effects of having fled and of having endured what can be a very difficult journey. Although you are not a psychologist and – as you are probably aware – should refer children for psychological counselling, it is helpful to know about the kind of psychological impacts fleeing from one’s home country can have on children and their parents. Understanding this background can support you to understand the sometimes unexpected behaviours of children. Connection, trust and compassion are what a child needs from you at every stage. In Chapter 2 you will find information about psychological effects.

In order to share your values of connection, trust and compassion you need to apply these values to your own life as well. It is much easier to share qualities with others if you have enough to share! If you only give away connection, trust and compassion who is going to take care of you? Giving away means that you do not have it for yourself any more. Sharing means that you enjoy these qualities for yourself as well as for your pupils. Chapter 7 provides exercises on connection, trust and compassion.

### **Recharge your batteries**

Self-care is crucial in educating refugee children. You can be confronted with personal stories that can be hard to grasp or process. It might be challenging for you to keep your personal and your working life separate. Especially when volunteering, teachers can be inclined to be 110% committed to their pupils. As volunteering



work shows: it is most healthy for everyone involved if you use a relay system. It is vital to take leisure time away from the premises where you volunteer or work. It is also important to enjoy your time away without feeling guilty about having a steady place to live and a more secure living environment than the refugee children you work with.

*recharge your batteries*

Please take time to recharge your own batteries. It is not possible to pour from an empty cup and only you can fill your own cup!

1. How do you recharge your energy?

---

---

---

---

2. Who will fill in for you when you are sick?

---

---

---

---

3. How do you ask for what you want? Do you hold back because you think your wishes and needs will not be met? Remember that people cannot read your mind, only when we ask for what we need can others know how to help us.

---

---

---

---

## 5 Tools for recharging

1. **Debrief** with your colleagues every day. It is vital to talk through what you have experienced and to be able to go home and lead 'your other life'.
2. **Stay in touch** with your friends and family back home via calling, visiting, WhatsApp and social media.
3. **Take your ideas seriously**, you are the expert on teaching refugee children. Write down any ideas you might have and share them with people who could make them happen.
4. **If bureaucracy is holding you back** in the organisation you are working with, look around you for grass roots organisations that might be in need of your expertise.
5. **Eat healthily, get enough sleep and be sure to exercise!** Your pupils learn more from what you do than from what you say. You are their role model.

## Positive teaching

While educating refugee children you are constantly challenged by looking at what can be done. You may have to deal with insufficient financial resources, the unexpected arrival and departure of pupils, lack of protocol and a lack of clarity about what a child has experienced on their journey. These are all challenges you need to handle while teaching.

Do not be discouraged. Keep up the positive teaching and thinking. If your starting point is 'What can be done in this situation?' you will create space and possibilities for yourself. You don't need to be perfect or to teach perfectly, often 'good' is 'good enough'.

*positive teaching*

## **An appointment with yourself is also an appointment**

*self-appointment*

Working hard, making that one last phone call, reluctantly participating in yet another working group, asking for extra funds or thinking about your own fundraising campaigns via social media. Challenges and temptations are part of daily life in schools. For children and also for teachers. We are teaching children to take care of themselves, to set their own boundaries and to engage with each other socially.

## **And what about you?**

*self-reflection*

1. How well are you taking care of yourself, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually?

---

---

---

---

*self-care*

2. Are you clear about your own boundaries and how do you communicate them to others?

---

---

---

---

3. What inspires you most in your contact with colleagues?

---

---

---

4. When do you have enough space for your personal growth?

---

---

---

---

5. Is self-care regularly on the agenda of (staff) meetings?

---

---

---

---

6. What does your soul need to recharge?

---

---

---

---

7. How many self-care appointments did you make with yourself this week?

---

---

---

---