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Editorial: Scrutinising educational responses to migration: critical perspectives on changes in educational practice, policy and research

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Editorial on the Research Topic

[Scrutinising educational responses to migration: critical perspectives on changes in educational practice, policy and research](#)

Even though migration is a core feature of global human history, it continues to be framed as a “problem,” “challenge,” and/or “crisis” for Western nations (Cantat et al., 2023; Rosen et al., 2023). Similarly, in education, migrant students are often approached by accentuating deficits in learning and participation, and along a patronising tendency that positions migrant students as “in need” for academic, language, and psychosocial support and intervention (Kowalczyk, 2010; Szelei et al., 2021; Bunar and Juvonen, 2022).

However, these imaginaries are intertwined with “real” hardships (Rosen et al., 2023). Some issues that continue to affect migrant students are, for example, early school leave, grade retention, and lower achievement (UNESCO, 2018; Wang, 2021); being approached by deficit thinking (Roy and Roxas, 2011; Szelei et al., 2021; Ahooja and Ballinger, 2022), lesser opportunities to access education, learn, and achieve (Ko and Hong, 2020; Emery et al., 2023), and facing segregation, discrimination, and racism (Bonal, 2012; Bunar and Juvonen, 2022; Helakorpi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the ways migrant students are imagined is interlinked with how teachers and the teaching profession is conceptualised (Szelei et al., 2021). Therefore, “migrant students in hardship” has induced images of “teachers in hardship” (powerlessness, insecurity, frustration, and struggle when facing migration and diversity) and/or images of teachers striving toward inclusion and social justice (Szelei et al., 2021, p. 13). A particular feature of school practices seems to be that these seemingly contradictory tendencies may occur simultaneously (Szelei et al., 2021; Chircop, 2022).

“Real and imagined” hardships then give rise to divergent educational responses (Rosen et al., 2023, p. 4). Over the years one could observe a proliferation of policy frameworks and structures, pedagogical conceptions and practices, and working mechanisms to support migrant students (Luciak, 2006; Kowalczyk, 2010; European Commission, 2013, 2020; Meehan et al., 2021). These educational responses can be broadly summarised as concerned

with inclusion related to cultural and ethnoracial diversity, multilingualism, and wellbeing (Bunar and Juvonen, 2022).

Despite the plethora of initiatives, educational changes relating to migration occupy an ambiguous role in transforming education systems. For Kowalczyk (2010), education remains a site of exclusion precisely due to the ways migrant children become “the object of reform.” On the other hand, Rosen (2023) argues that, even if initiatives are born out of “crisis,” they may provide “different opportunities for care, resistance, and solidarity” (p. 21). Research has indeed demonstrated practices through which school practitioners cherished relationships with migrant students and communities, collectively reimagined education, ensured quality learning, and instilled learning experiences for justice (Taylor and Sidhu, 2012; Ginsberg et al., 2018; Wrench et al., 2018; Kim and Kwon, 2023).

It is precisely this ambivalent character of educational responses that we wished to examine under the magnifying glass in this Research Topic. The aim was to provide a deeper understanding on what role educational responses played in the struggle toward social, racial and linguistic justice by (1) interrelating policies, structures, and grand narratives of “migration” and “education” in K-12 education, and (2) examining “responses” as tightly embedded in local histories, and socio-cultural-political contexts.

The articles in this Research Topic offer such analysis by focusing on schooling practices (primary, secondary, and vocational schools), the works of teachers and other practitioners working with and in schools and educational institutions. Altogether, the articles explore teachers’ perceptions and attitudes, school practices, and ways of doing research. They contribute to the field by offering an analysis well-grounded in the local societal and policy environment of the respective countries, thus, relating macro societal discourses and policies to educational conceptions and responses to migration.

Soye et al. explore teachers’ perceptions relating to the recognition of newcomer students in England and Norway. This study captures teachers’ voices regarding how their practices of classroom integration, pastoral care and examination periods are shaped by national education policies. The findings detail teachers’ structural, personal, and professional dilemmas as they navigate universalist and difference-specific politics of recognition. The authors argue for policies to recognise the needs of newcomer students and to be supportive of teachers in their work.

Wagner et al. discuss teachers’ practices in Austria by situating them in two types of structural language support models: one where migrant students follow language support separate from the mainstream, and another where students stay together, each following individualised learning. The article presents how classroom practices are underpinned by notions of “normalcy,” language hierarchies and cultural (in)visibility. The authors suggest a flexible approach to providing language support that embeds cultural and language knowledges in curricular teaching-learning.

Klöpfer et al. explore the interrelations between the so-called “welcome culture” in Germany and teachers’ perceptions in the context of receiving and supporting Syrian and Ukrainian refugee students. This research report highlights the limitations of “welcoming” some students vs. others and explores cultural

biases when it comes to practices of integrating, educating, and accepting refugee students. The authors argue for these tensions to be seen as an opportunity for critical reflection and learning to strive for inclusion.

Thomas et al. explore how various stakeholders and refugee students conceptualise educational inclusion in vocational education and training (VET) in Germany. They introduce the “real world lab,” a collaborative research methodology, to map current issues and imagine future scenarios. The findings depict a process of listening to refugee students and practitioners working with them to understand learning in VET, structural and cultural barriers, and policy regulations in rural contexts in reimagining inclusion.

This Research Topic offers insights for future policy and practice. Facilitating, planning, and implementing mechanisms and structures are needed that allow for collaboration and reflection to create inclusive learning environments and increase learning outcomes. Educational responses to migration are to be seen as continual, cyclical and deeply reflexive processes that should be addressed pro-actively. Moving beyond “crisis” narratives and creating counter narratives could directly inform policy (e.g., about naming practices, structures of support, the representation of home languages, cultures, and identities). Thus, positioning the school community with its various actors (students, parents, teachers, other professionals) as powerful in bringing about change and crafting contextually relevant, nuanced responses is essential.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

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