The use of storytelling and the experience of teaching in a Syrian Refugee Camp in the context of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, its various actors, and its lasting effects

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Introduction

The beginning of this journey began with a jarring, but all too common image in Lebanon. Refugee children walking the crowded streets of Beirut selling items ranging from water to roses. Children as young as four were knocking on my window as we drove through Lebanon to my family’s hometown of Aley. I had just graduated high school and had my mind set on the future. However, the image remained. Studying the Syrian refugee crisis and striving to make a difference was a goal set from my first semester of college, and with the immense help of Dr. Aliza Wong and Dr. Gary Elbow, we created this project. I began this project that consists of two sections: 1) a historical analysis on the implication of the refugee crisis in Lebanon, and 2) teaching through storytelling and self-narrative within a school in the largest Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon: Jurahiye.

Field Work

The fieldwork of this project took place over the summer of 2019. I worked in the Jurahiye refugee camp with Jusoor NGO. This was the largest Syrian refugee camp in Lebanon. I taught at a school within the refugee camp. Through this month-long summer school, I designed a curriculum and schedule. I also collaborated with my students on a story-telling project. This project was carried throughout the entirety of the school session. The children within my class were taught about the importance of story-telling, the writing process, and the importance of symbolism. They then each wrote a story over a period of two weeks.

Conclusion

After funding was cut by UNWRA in late August of 2018, a trickle-down effect occurred on many NGOs in Lebanon including SaveTheChildren. According to a late September email from Mr. Chidiac, the management was still deciding on new proposals and projects. Furthermore, the inclination was given that this lapse in funding had caused a problem that NGOs were still adjusting to well into the start of the new academic year. As for the following year focus of the research has shifted to look at history of NGOs in Lebanon and the effect of this decrease in funding. This project then took a different turn through the work at the Jurahiye school and the storytelling project. My students were overwhelmingly interactive, collaborative, and had a love for learning. I truly admired the resoundingly positive outlook they had towards education and life despite the trauma they had endured. Everyday they embraced the science, art, math, and English assignments I had prepared. They were brilliant and creative, even designing original theatre plays. Many of the children would work in the evenings while attending school in the mornings; however, they always had the energy to engage and learn. The care and compassion these children had was moving; they would selflessly try to give gifts and food to their fellow classmates and myself. It was truly a privilege to teach this children. Their resilience, intelligence, and compassion was moving.

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References


Stories

Story one - Bader

This story revolves around a ferris on a white horse. In Arabic, the term ferris means a warrior or hero. This warrior would help people in need and therefore was beloved by all. One day, the ferris went to a small store to eat and while he was there, criminals attempted to rob the store. The warrior thwarted the burglary and saved the store owner. To thank him for his bravery, the store owner insisted that he receive free food. The day only got worse when, after stopping the robbery, the warrior returned home to find that his town has been pillaged and his family killed. Devastated, he returned home to find a note from his mother that pleaded with him to avenge his family against the people who had destroyed his town. The hero made vengeance his mission, found the murderers, killed them, and rode off on his white horse.

Story two - Hadeel

This story focuses on a family with two parents and four children. The mother becomes pregnant and to pay for her hospital bills, her father sells a family heirloom made of silver. The mother then passes away after childbirth. The father works to provide for the family but passes away soon thereafter. After his passing, the older brother must care for his siblings. He works in the streets selling gum and roses (a common job for refugee children in Lebanon). He also helps his siblings with their education. Once his siblings become educated, the older brother also completes his own education. The story ends with the siblings becoming successful and staying close.

Story three - Mohammed

This story revolves around a poor child who lives in a castle, rich as much alike. These kids meet and become friends. They come up with a plan to switch lives. The poor child can live in a castle, eat as much food as he wants, and change clothes multiple times because his closet is overflowing. The rich child realizes that wealth is not that it appears to be as he is bullied by his new friends. The both children miss their families dearly. When the children return to their respective lives, they arrive with newfound knowledge. The rich child realizes how he could not adjust to the difficulties of poverty and live the other’s life. The poor child gains a new graduate for his family despite their lack of wealth.