

A WELCOME FAR FROM HOME

Planning around the needs of students from refugee families can be hard – but as Hannah Day explains, there are certain things teachers can do that will always prove helpful...

We've all watched the war in Ukraine unfold with horror, but thus far it's remained largely at what feels like a helpless distance. Yet that distance has now shortened for some of us, due to the arrival of new students from Ukraine in many classrooms – including my own.

Sadly, the presence of refugees in schools across England is nothing new. I recall welcoming new classmates from Serbia back when I was a pupil myself, and more recently we've seen children arrive from Iran, Iraq and Syria, as well as many other countries.

Whether you've become used to welcoming the children of displaced families, or are educating a refugee in your class for the first time, there are some key approaches that we can all take.

1 The practicalities

Firstly, we must make the practical elements of being in school as simple as possible. If we don't support refugees in managing their day-to-day lives at school we're contributing an extra layer of difficulty right from the start, so pay attention to the following:

Pronunciation of names

You may need to record some names phonetically, at first. I've found many students choose to simplify their names, but this should

always be their choice. If in doubt, see if your English or MFL teachers can assist you with any pronunciation issues rather than the student themselves, as such enquiries may make them feel self-conscious.

Religion

Make sure you know not just which religion – if indeed any – they follow, but how they practice. We understand that the Catholic church and the CofE are different, so apply that same mindset to all other faiths. Ask the student to note down anything that might need to be facilitated for them for religious reasons, such as dietary requirements, adjustments to uniform or prayer spaces.

Orientation

Ensure that maps of your school are clearly presented, and easily available as digital versions that admin staff can use to add notes in the student's own language. There's no point labelling the toilets in English only if their English is poor.

Equipment

Many will have arrived in this country with nothing. Appoint a lead member of staff to be responsible for them, who can then provide them with the necessary stationary, uniform items and so forth.

Use picture labels

Is there any signage within your school that could use a

picture label? This is fairly common in primary schools to help pupils with emerging English skills, and can be applied here. It can be especially useful in lessons where specialised equipment will be used, such as art and science.

Buddy system

Give the student a ready-made friend via a respected and acknowledged role to give it status. While there may be other refugees at your school, perhaps from the same country, it's generally best if a 'buddy' is an established student with a good set of friends, so that all students can mix freely.

2 Their emotional needs

Next, you'll need to consider their emotional needs. We know that relaxed and positive students achieve well, and refugees are no different.

Help them make links

Make space in the day for any refugees from the same country to meet. They may be in different year groups, but just having a chance to talk in your own language to someone else about experiences common to both of you can be an important source of relief.

Say 'hello' their way

Encourage a basic use of the student's first language across the group, such as the words for 'hello' and 'goodbye'. This should be

embedded and said without fanfare. Don't draw attention to the fact, as it may embarrass the student or make them feel singled out. Just drop it in casually where you can.

Focus on strengths and achievements

Bear in mind that these students will be settling into a whole new way of learning. I've been interested in finding how out my subject, art and design, is typically delivered in Ukraine. Much of what we do isn't covered in their specifications, with the upshot that Ukrainian students can initially find themselves resistant or confused in lessons. What areas or skills do they excel in? Celebrate and acknowledge these.

Share common experiences

While very few of us will have been forced to leave our homes with little or no warning, we can all relate to the idea of experiencing change we haven't welcomed and what it's like to endure times of stress. Don't be afraid to talk about this. Simple opening statements, such as *'I don't know what you're experiencing or feeling, but I do remember when...'* are a good way of making an emotional connection without belittling their experiences or comparing them to yours.

Celebrate what they bring to the school

As you get to know them,

“Is there any signage within your school that could use a picture label?”

consider how you can incorporate their knowledge and experiences into your lessons. Our Ukrainian students have excellent technical skills, which is why we’ve asked them to help their fellow students with various tools via our digital editing programs.

Make the process of welcoming new people to your school part of its ethos and a core value. Explicitly communicate this to students, staff and parents, clarifying how refugees should be welcomed both in school and throughout the wider community. Make sure the school is setting the tone.

3 During lessons

Education is our game, but we should recognise that the two pastoral stages outlined above must come first. Now, you can start to teach them...

Pre-translate key vocabulary

Prepare a glossary of key words with translations, and ask them to work on a number of these each week. They may need support staff to assist them – don’t expect them to be able to do it all alone.

Avoid idioms

Yes, they’ll be ‘in at the deep end’ at first, but phrases like that won’t translate. Keep it simple.

Communicate

purpose and targets

Do this as simply and as clearly as possible, translating just a few key points. If the student knows why they’re being asked to complete a particular lesson activity, it will help with buy-in – particularly when the educational approaches

you’re using may be vastly different to what they’ve experienced previously.

Web translator apps

Finally, there’s no shame in getting some help from an app. Download one and use it whenever all else fails.

With these practical suggestions, refugee students should be able to manage the school day easily, and soon become as much a part of your school as any other student.

If you’re struggling with communication issues, here are some strategies that may help...

PACE

Developed by Dr Dan Hughes, this approach is well-suited to children who have experienced stress. The name stands for Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy, and the aim is to build trust and relationships which will lead to better outcomes.

ddpnetwork.org

ZONES OF REGULATION

If you’re finding that your new students are presenting disruptive emotions, this strategy can be used to help them categorise and understand how they’re feeling, ultimately leading to scaffolding supportive measures.

zonesofregulation.com

HARVARD UNIVERSITY – RELIANCE

Getting children to draw or list both the challenges they face and their ways of coping as two sides of a see-saw can help them see which is more heavily weighted. You can then help them manage each side one by one.

developingchild.harvard.edu



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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