

NERA BOARD PANEL 2016:

The refugee situation a Nordic context, its implications for education and its challenges to educational researchers

The current refugee situation caused by war and unstable societies in regions deeply involved in conflict - with many families as well as children without families or relatives on the run searching for shelter in Europe - is a challenge for our societies. The European, and not the least Nordic nations states have all reacted differently to the crisis, but a common thread is that the crisis challenges core values of our societies and therefore also challenges education and educational research, which appears on many levels: how to relate to the growing number of refugee children in school? What happens to ideas of national identity /integration/multiculturalism? What happens to notions of solidarity, social inclusion, equality and global/European/Nordic citizenship in a situation where many nation states seem to be more concerned with protecting national borders and conceptions of national social coherence than finding joint supranational solutions? The NERA-board have asked representatives from each of the Nordic countries to give their reflections on the current situation based on own research and as a joint focus for all presenters to reflect on the situation for refugee children in the respective national schools but also broader to give views on the current refugee-situation and challenges for educational research. Moreover the board has asked Lovisa Bergdahl to give an introduction based on the discussion and initiative initiated at the European Educational Research Association EERA conference in Budapest Hungary last year. Each presenter has up to 8 minutes.

The board encourages all NERA network to debate the topic beforehand, present views and participate in the discussion after the panel presentations.

Schedule

Chairs and presenters of theme: Niels Kryger, NERA Board member & Carl-Anders Säfström, President of NERA

Lovisa Bergdahl, Senior Lecturer, Södertörn University in cooperation with Ola Lindberg, Caroline Runesdotter and Sverker Lindblad

Introduction to the theme: The starting point in the introduction is the current situation of large refugee migration into Europe as identified by EERJ Initiative Group, 2015, (see

<https://ec.europa.eu/epale/da/node/14226>). As an inspiration for the Nordic discussion I will talk about experiences of and stances to the current refugee situation among teachers and researchers, based on an inquiry addressed to members of SWERA (Swedish Educational Research Association). I will discuss intellectual responsibilities and institutional obligations in receiving refugees. What is going on? How is recognized? And what to do in Swedish, Nordic and international contexts in personal, professional and organizational ways

Norway: Carla Chinga-Ramirez, Associate Professor, NTNU, Trondheim

In the Norwegian society the number of refugees has grown rapidly. Using a critical, cultural analytical approach to the Norwegian educational system, I show that the school is framed in a cultural notion of equality understood as sameness. Throughout the Norwegian history, the school has been a key institution in creating the Norwegian national community based on a common origin and ancestry. In schools this cultural characteristic is equated with being Norwegian and therefore equal. What consequences does this cultural characteristic have for potential students with non-Western, visible ethnic minority background to participate in the Norwegian community and education as equals?

Iceland: Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, Professor, School of Education, University of Iceland

Around 580 quota refugees have settled in Iceland the last decades. A group of 35 refugees from Syria arrived in 2016 and more groups are expected later in 2016. I will focus on good educational practices for inclusion of newly arrived refugee children in pre- and compulsory schools. More broadly I discuss the dilemma of addressing diversities in society and education by categorizing children into quota refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants etc. I argue that the focus on the needs of these so-called groups can create unnecessary divisions and obstacles in education and society rather than paying attention to children's experiences, competences and individual needs.

Sweden: Niclas Månsson, Professor, Mälardalen University

Transnational migration has been a constant element of human existence. In recent years, question refugees have been the focus of public discourses in Sweden. At the same time institutional measures are striving for the inclusion of refugees, they are being (dis-)placed in 'detention centers', at the margins of society. This procedure often involves a process of negative socialization that rather cement the notion of the refugee as a stranger in relation to the dominant group and the nation state. This development has important implications for education, since it provides a persuasive orientation for an educational system in society.

Denmark: Vibe Larsen, Lecturer, Head of Research-program 'Diversity and Social Innovation', University College of Capital, UCC

The number of refugees has grown in Denmark even though the government has tried to diminish it. The situation challenges Danish society, not least at the political level. With experiences from the 80's and the 90's in mind, I will argue that the refugee situation challenges the educational system and seems to have led to an increased focus on a mono-cultural version of Danish-ness . Furthermore a new school reform has shifted focus away from ethnic minority children in practice and research. With this I mind, I raise the question: Are we prepared for a situation with new groups of refugees in the educational system in Denmark.

Finland: Maria Ahlholm, Lecturer at University of Helsinki

In Finland the number of asylum seekers was ten-fold in 2015 compared with 2013. Although the absolute amount is only 20 % of the parallel number in Sweden, the growth curve is steeper than in any other Nordic country. The change has revealed the unpreparedness of our educational system – although praised as the best in the world – in front of challenges by the increased cultural, linguistic and educational heterogeneity. Surprisingly, the informal, voluntary, non-paid, off-the-record input in education has become invaluable. The positive scenarios for the future language education and research will be presented in my introduction.