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Creating places, relationships and education for refugee children in camps: Lessons learnt from the 'The School of Peace' educational model

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Abstract

This paper describes a unique model for building an afternoon school for refugee children sustained by volunteers and refugee teachers and based on humanistic intercultural values. The methodology is participatory including the whole school, from children to teachers to volunteers and managers. Central themes in the findings include a synergetic focus on creative placemaking, conflict negotiation and formal studies. This points to a theoretical connection between informal and formal studies. The findings teach us about the needs of refugee children. A methodological contribution is the use of arts-based methods to capture refugee children's lived experiences of school.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe a unique, bottom-up model for building a school based on humanistic intercultural values in a post-disaster refugee area. We think that this model will be of use in similar contexts. This single case study can teach us about the needs of refugee children, as well as provide strategies to reach these needs with limited resources in additional similar contexts.

The School of Peace is a unique refugee school for children from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Kurdistan and North Africa that is a part of the community center One Happy Family, founded to cater for the refugees on the Island of Lesbos, near to the capital, Mitilini. The school is democratically run and

taught by refugees from the camp, who each teach children from their own culture and ethnicity in the school. They are headed by a group of Jewish and Arab volunteers from Israel who are members of a socialist youth movement in Israel, called 'Hashomer Hatzair', and its Arab sister movement, 'Ajial', in Israel. The Jewish and Arab volunteers' role is to logistically and pedagogically manage the school. This school reveals a unique, bottom-up, flexible, but value-led, model. It is sustained by the refugees and by the volunteer Israeli youth educators. There is no single headmaster but weekly meetings between the different teachers and volunteers run the school. The proclaimed aim of the school is to create a democratic process of dialogue and compromises between the different cultures in the school, thus providing an antecedent for the violence of the refugee camps where the children live, as well as a model for a better life. The school provides both formal and informal education, integrating ethno-cultural content and root in the classroom frame, as well as universal values of equality and non-violence in the shared activities and places. Its curriculum includes formalised studies, such as math, English and Science and art, but also, life skills, and culture of origin in the mother tongue of the children. English is the language of communication in the public areas and whole school activities and is the central subject taught in all classes. The school is an afternoon school, situated outside of the refugee camp in a community center, and it provides a hot meal for the children. The physical building of the school in the community center was a set of shacks built by, and is kept up by volunteers, teachers, children and parents in the context of extremely limited funding.

LITERATURE SURVEY

In general, the research on refugee children and schools tends to focus on the integration of refugee students in host country schools, rather than on the schools in or next to detention camps of children without migrant status, maybe because these frameworks are perceived of as only temporary. However, children can spend a few years in these schools (Amthor, 2017; Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Oikonomidoy, Salas, Karam, Warren, & Steinmann, 2018). Another reason for a lack of literature on such schools may be that it is often hard to evaluate the impact of such educational settings as the context is so volatile, improvised and changing (Lund & Brun, 2010).

Refugee schools in refugee detention camps are often impoverished frameworks that can only provide low standards of education, however, they also have major strengths as the motivation, commitment and social organisation of the entire refugee community. Knowledge and skills are perceived of as hope for the future and assets that cannot be taken away and thus the children and families are often motivated to study (Rutter & Crispin, 2012). Refugee pupils often study extra hard under difficult circumstances because they realise that it is their only hope, and they experience the intense meaning their parents give to education as their future (Rutter & Crispin, 2012; Yule, 1998). This can create better performance than in local schools in poor neighbourhoods, as shown in the examples of Uganda and Nepal.

Most schools use a pyramidal framework with the refugee community at the base, the pupils and teachers in the middle, and the program managers at the apex. Refugee teachers are often willing to give their services for little or no pay. Challenges of refugee camp schools are a lack of trained teachers and a lack of physical resources, low salaries for teachers, and thus, reduced motivation (Coulby & Crispin, 2018; Hos & Cinarbas, 2018). Another challenge can be cultural differences in methods of education. This includes tensions between the more child-centred, informal teaching methods of Western educational systems presented by NGOs as compared to the more hierarchical and formalistic methods of teaching found in traditional non-Western countries of origin of the refugees (Rutter &

Crispin, 2012). However, in spite of these cultural problems, there is very little literature about the value of multicultural education in the refugee context. Peacebuilding curricula that aim to psychosocially address inter-ethnic conflicts are more common in Africa than in Europe, although the children are mainly in the camps because of such conflicts (Bird, 2003). It is important to state that the school in this study focuses on both multicultural and conflict negotiation issues.

METHODS

The research method chosen is participatory case study using phenomenological arts-based methods. The rational for this is that, as stated above, these schools are less researched than migrant children's schools with status in host schools. Additionally it was important for us to showcase the voices of refugee children themselves who are underrepresented in research as subjects or agents. The single participatory case study approach may also help overcome the challenges of researching high context, volatile and ad hoc educational settings. They often have long-term and unexpected reverberations that are difficult to capture in formal research methods due to shifting context, people, cultural differences and multiple perspectives (Baruch, 2009; Chase et al., 1999; Creswell, 2005; Dominelli, 2006; Norris, 2006). One such perspective is that of the children themselves, who experience extremely high-context childhoods and develop both stress reactions, but also, innovative coping skills that challenge existing knowledge of Western, middle class childhood. These children need the most effective educational and psychosocial services adjusted to their specific needs. Theoretical discourse indicates that children and youth are knowledgeable regarding their own lives, and that they have ideas, attitudes and interests that may be perceived successfully through interaction with them (Clark, 2011). The rights of children to consult and express their worldview as well as influence their lives and the services provided for them are thus relevant for such extremely disadvantaged children as those living in refugee camps (Aubrey & Dahl, 2006; Bader, Wanono, Hamden, & Skinner, 2007; Chamberlayn & Smith, 2008; Clark & Statham, 2005; Green & Hogan, 2005). For this reason, the research method of this paper is case study based so as to capture multiple perspectives and aims to include the voices of all of the children in the school, as well as those of the teachers and volunteers.

In order to capture children's voices who come from multiple cultures and who cannot read and write due to lack of schooling, phenomenological arts-based method such as drawings as triggers for discussion are recommended as a natural developmentally appropriate form for children to express themselves (Eisner, 1997; Huss, 2012; Huss, Kaufman, & Segal-Engelchin, 2015; Huss, & Sela-Amit, 2017; Mason, 2002). The mind is programmed to translate composition into content meaning and to connect this information to perceptual and emotional arousal. Images thus trigger emotional reactions within us that encourage verbalisation and further interpretation. Arts are a natural language for children that integrate emotions and perceptions within the developmental level, serving as a trigger for a narrative. Drawings, that are metonymic and metaphorical, reveal cultural values and ways of seeing and understanding the world and are thus an ethnographic tool (Conway, 2009; Holmes & Mathews, 2010; Huss, Kaufman, & Segal-Engelchin, 2015; Huss, & Sela-Amit, 2017). This methodology was chosen for this research so as to integrate the multiple voices of the different stakeholders, those of the children, youth workers and youth teachers and external actors, each with different mother tongues, into an overall evaluation of the school.

Observation is also a central methodology for researching children, as children embody their experience in what they do rather than in what they say. Thus, the researchers also sat and observed the breaks and classrooms over a period of 3 days. Additional data of this case study included interviews with the teachers and volunteers.

Field site: Refugee camps in Lesbos

Refugees have usually escaped traumatic war situations and face resulting health and stress problems, as well as the challenge of managing in the present with a lack of money and in the current policy-reduced hope to reach their wished-for final destination in Europe (Eleftherakos et al., 2018; Krikigianni, 2016; UNHCR, 2018). The camps on the island are characterised by escalating inter-ethnic violence and struggle to meet day to day needs. Many of the children, called 'the lost generation', have missed out on schooling, with a few who were or are in sporadic school situations. The island of Lesbos has a school within the camp of Karatape. Some refugee children go to this school in the morning and to the School of Peace in the afternoon.

The refugees in Lesbos number between 20 and 30 thousand people, and they are gathered in two central refugee camps. The School of Peace is an afternoon school that serves 100 refugee children from the refugee camps of Moria and Karatape who arrived with their families to the island of Lesbos. Lesbos receives, as of 2015, up to 5,000 refugees a day that arrived via Turkey. The afternoon school is within the 'One Happy Family' community center on the island that is located about 3 miles from each of these camps. The community enter was set up in 2017 by Swiss volunteers. The 'School of Peace', was set up by the Israeli youth movements, 'Hashomer Hatzair', and its Arabic sister, 'Ajial'. The school started with 20 children and rose to 100 over the 3 years that it has been working.

The school started as an informal education framework, but in alignment with the wishes of the volunteers, they started detaching formal studies. The school is populated by Syrian, African (mostly Congolese), Persian/Yazidi, Afghani and Kurdish children that are taught in their own language and divided into two classes each of younger and older students. The teachers, who are volunteers from these respective groups, are paid a small salary, that is similar to the pocket money the Israeli youth leaders receive from their movements. The school works 5 days a week, but the teachers add a 6 day for meetings.

The children arrive by bus in the afternoon and receive snacks (a sandwich and fruit), as well as a hot supper after their classes. The community volunteers, teachers and youth leaders physically built the buildings of the school. The youth leaders maintain two full-time workers and groups of volunteers (up to 10) who come for 3-week periods over the year. The school day starts at 3 p.m. when the children arrive. They then learn their mother language and culture, math and English until 5 p.m., when they have a snack. From 5 to 6:30 p.m., they learn arts, games, sports and then have a joint supper provided by the school and get on busses back to the camps.

Research strategy

This project was a single case study that approached the school to study it from multiple perspectives and methods (Yin, 1993). We used arts-based methods with all of the groups of children, teachers and staff members.

Protocol

The whole of the school drew and then explained what they liked about the school and what was challenging. This occurred as a special activity within the school day led by the first and second authors who gathered the data (one an experienced school psychologist and researcher and one an experienced

arts-based researcher and social worker). The drawings were then hung up, and a class discussion, led by the author–researchers and the teachers, provided additional focus group data (Huss, 2012, 2015; Mason, 2002).

Additional methods were observation of the school by the two researchers for a period of 3 days and verbal interviews undertaken with key figures.

Data sources

Three types of data sources were used in this paper:

- Arts-based research, including images of all of the children and staff, concerning what is good and what is bad about this school, drawn and then explained to the rest of the class (see theoretical explanation above). The arts-based data sources were 100 pictures with written explanations on them, 80 pictures from the respective classes of 10 children on average and 20 from the staff and volunteers.
- Transcribed semi-structured interviews with teachers and volunteers. Transcribed interviews came from founders, community leaders, teachers, parents and youth leaders that included information of past struggles of the school.
- Observation of the school in action. Observational data included observation of the school and its students, meaning that what people 'do' rather than what people 'say' is a central tool for researching children who embody and enact their lives, rather than turning them into abstract concepts (Creswell, 2005). The researchers and authors of this paper are a multidisciplinary team, including a social worker, an educational psychologist, a psychologist, a psycholinguist, a youth expert and a social community organiser.

Data analysis

All of the data, both visual and verbal, were analysed thematically as part of an overall picture of the school. In terms of visual data, a phenomenological analytical prism was used with the images. That is to say that the images were a trigger for a narrative (Huss, 2012). The verbal data, that is the narratives that the images triggered, the observations and the interviews, were analysed thematically in light of the research questions, as is usual in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hubberman & Miles, 2002).

Reliability and trustworthiness

The group discussion helped to situate the individual phenomenological images within a shared-reality and cultural context. Additionally, all themes were peer validated by the staff who commented and confirmed them after they had been written up (Hubberman & Miles, 2002; Patton, 1987). The above-described interdisciplinary team of authors, who are experts in community work, youth, education, disaster rehabilitation and arts-based participatory research methods, met regularly to peer analyse the data so that there would be multiple perspectives in the data analysis. The use of three data sources across the whole school also helped to triangulate the data and enhance its validity. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011).

In terms of positionality of researchers, as stated above, our research team is an interdisciplinary group of researchers. While we were all very supportive of the volunteer initiative of the school and are from the country of the founding volunteers, we were not directly connected to it in any way. As shown above, we set up the research so as to access difficulties and challenges in the school, so as to further improve it and to be of direct help to those doing this important voluntary work and to create models for others.

Ethical considerations

Because the research is participatory and was used as a self-evaluating reflective tool for the school itself, then the data were not 'taken away' from the school, but rather, served as an enriching evaluative and transformative activity within the school. The class discussion of the images enabled a reflective space for the class to think about the school as a group and to return their own knowledge about the school to each other (Clark, 2011; Huss, & Sela-Amit, 2017). The focus of the research was not the personal lives of past traumas of the participants, but rather, their understanding and experience of the school, so that it did not raise traumas or expose personal issues.

All parents of the children and participants signed consent for the research. All identifying features of the children were removed. We received the university ethics committee certification to undertake this research.

RESULTS AND DATA PRESENTATION

The themes were organised according to the different cultural and age groups, teachers and volunteers, so as to maintain multiple positions and perspectives. The thematic data analysis rendered three central areas of content respectively:

1. The physical elements of the school.
2. The relational elements of the school.
3. The curriculum elements of the school.

Each of these themes divided into challenges and strengths. These themes are presented narratively so that the observations, visual data and interviews are combined into a coherent whole within each age group and ethnic group (students, teachers, volunteers, and Singhalese, Syrian, and Iranian children; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Huss, 2012, 2015).

Theme 1: Physical elements of the school

Negative physical elements of the school: Children

This included a lack of books to learn from, lack of places to play, bad food and more. The older children, especially from Afghanistan (who were more middle class and remembered normal schools outside of the refugee context), complained about the lack of physical amenities in the school. One stated, 'There are no text books, no note books - no pencils - how can we learn like this?'

Negative physical elements of the school: Staff

The teachers compared to the youth workers (who set up the school physically) also complained about the difficulty in teaching the children without text books, teaching materials and physical spaces in the school. Quotes from staff members include, 'We need more classes, more spaces to play', 'We have no books, pencils, papers', 'We need more place for the students to move around' and 'We need a room for the teachers'.

Both children and teachers stated that the food was not good. We present here quotes that exemplify this:

'I hate the food.'

'I don't like the taste of this food.'

'I am a teacher, and I cannot eat that food…'

'The food is bad; there are no materials to make good food.'

'There is bad food, not cooked properly, and it is hard for me to make the children eat it when I don't want to eat it…on the other hand the children really need that meal.'

This theme was drawn as lacking textbooks and notebooks and school materials and images of food with crosses through it (Figure 1).

Compared to this, the youth volunteers (who returned to their better apartments and food) did not place such importance on the physicality of the elements. This is seen in the following quotes: 'We come from a kibbutz; we are not used to fancy food. We don't know how to cook, and we have very little money', and 'It is important for the parents that the children get an evening meal; this is the best we can do'.

This created tension as the volunteers experienced themselves as doing the best they can, building classrooms, finding the cheapest food, while the volunteer teachers and children suffered from the physical lacking, which continued into their life after school.

Positive physical elements of the school: Students

Interestingly, together with these physical lacks in resources, such as study aids and good food, a central theme that emerged in all of the ethnicities and age groups of the children was their place attachment to the school and love of having a physical 'school'—an actual place of gathering to go to every day that they were attached to. They pointed out the aesthetic quality of the school that is colourfully painted and decorated (as compared to the refugee camp). The following quotes exemplify this:

'I like to come to school every day.'

'I like to go to the school, there is nothing bad about going to school all children should go to school our school is very pretty.'
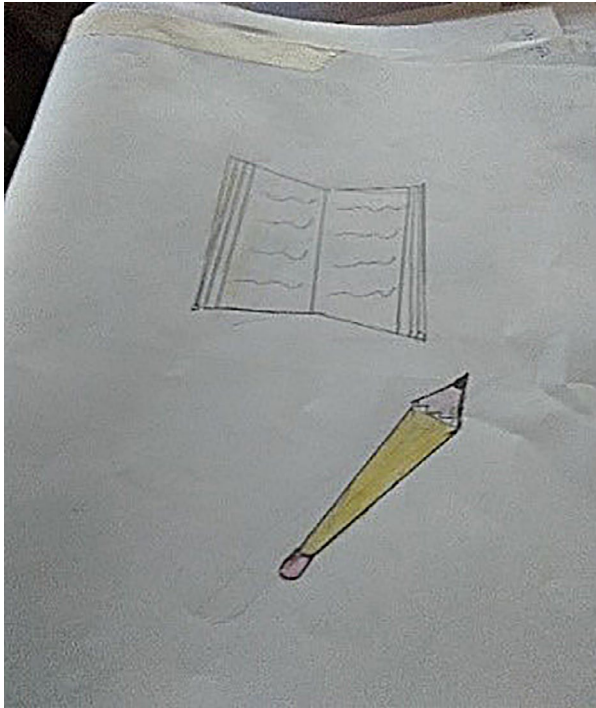
'Just having a school is good that we come every day.'

FIGURE 1 Many students drew the things lacking for them, such as pencils and notebooks, saying that these things are lacking

'I love my classroom.'

'We care for our classroom.'

'We keep it looking nice.'

'We clean it every day, we paint things, we put up pictures.'

Another element of the physicality of the school was leaving the camp, having a bus ride and having a routine. One student said, 'Going to school is so nice'. The refugee camp is made of tin huts, and there is much tension between the different ethnic groups, struggling with poverty, alcohol and drugs, sexual violence and a general sense of despair. Thus, getting onto the school bus and going to school enabled the children to swap this with a different environment. Some additional quotes that exemplify this include:

'I like the school bus…'

'Every day I put on my best clothes for school.'

'We come by bus, and it is safe here. We laugh and sing on the bus.'

'I like to have an outing on the bus; I sit by my friend every day.'

This theme also included the place where the school was situated, as a part of the community center, that being also a positive place for their parents. This was expressed in the following quotes: 'I like the community center; it has a garden, and people are happy here', 'I like the sports…' and 'It is a nice place to be'.

This also counteracted the problem with the simple food: 'I like eating together, sitting together, singing before we eat. We all have supper together that is nice'. We see that the same theme is both a source of stress and a source of strength.

The positive elements of the school: Volunteers and teachers

This duality continued with the youth workers and teachers who also stressed their pride in building the school. This can be seen in the following quotes:

> 'We didn't have classrooms, so we built them in the community center, out of bits of wood we got hold of, we built the school out of nothing, we made desks and benches. The people in the community center helped us, we are very proud of these buildings.'

> 'There is a special school week every few weeks—where everyone, including the parents and teachers, work on the school to fix things, paint things, and decorate things. It is the best week, all the parents, students, teachers, and youth workers work together to make the school beautiful…it is a very important week.'

> 'Our school is colorful, we look after it, it is not a grey asphalt building like other camp schools, the walls are painted, we made things out of wood we put our souls in the school building.'

This theme is strengthened by observing the school and by the positive drawings of the school that the children created (Figure 2).

We see that for the whole school, its physicality is cited as an experience of lack, but also, as a place that is experienced as positive and important.

Summary of first theme

The first theme was the experience of lack, but also, of attachment and pride in the physical elements of the school. Through active investment in the school as outside of the camp, within a 'normal' community center environment, and with much personal investment of the volunteers, staff and parents, the school transformed into a special space, into a 'home'. This place attachment element can be understood as especially relevant for displaced refugees.

Theme 2: Relationships in the school

Fighting and conflicts in the school: Between children

The theme of conflict and potential violence permeated all levels of the school, in relation to ethnicity and gender. This was a accessed through observations of the children in classes and in breaks, and the children also drew and talked about this (Figure 3).

FIGURE 2 Positive issues of physicality-loving space of school. The children drew many images of the school as a colourful positive house and place: These pictures express developmentally appropriate experiences of the environment as positive, colourful, stimulating and emotionally warm. Interestingly in this theme then the school is drawn as a house, rather than as a school or institution; This may express the corrective element of school as a normative 'home' as compared to the institution of school or of the refugee camp

An additional theme of the older children was conflicts with the teachers as limiting their rights. One student said, 'Why can't we go into the staff room and have tea? Why do we have to clean up?'

Fighting and conflicts in the school: Staff and volunteers

The staff described the challenge of conflicts and violent behaviour between the children and conflicts over limits as the most challenging element in their work. Many quotes showcased this theme, including:

'This is a constant struggle, to manage their fighting, on the bus, in the class, in the break.'

'It's hard to work with children or other teachers that don't have my language.'

'How to stop the fighting between the children?'

'I don't like it that the children fight all the time in the school but there are so many problems, I don't know which one to address first.'
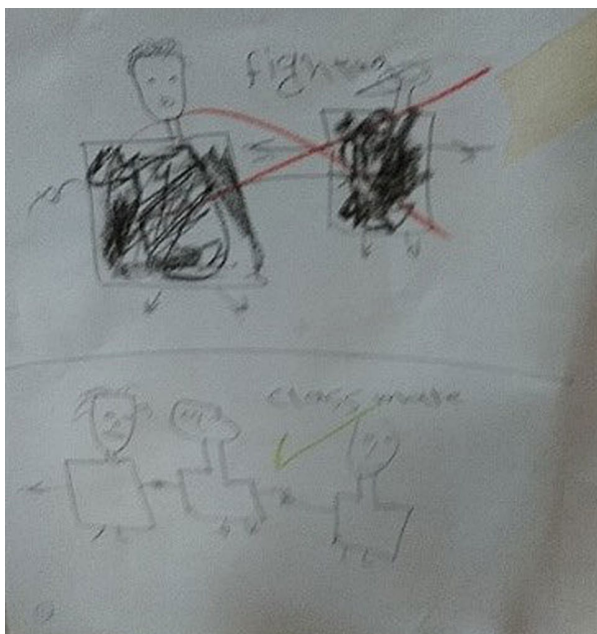
FIGURE 3 Children fighting constantly

'There are also problems between girls and boys; they are not used to being together in their cultures.'

'There are constant problems of physical violence - also here - and also in the camp.'

'I think they only understand if they get physical punishment, but this isn't the way of this school.'

'The older youth constantly demand more rights.'

'The children are traumatized, have not learnt to live in frameworks; this is taken out in fighting inside the group.'

'Also, the tensions between the ethnic groups of the adults is repeated and enacted between the different groups in the school.'

A source of conflict between teachers and volunteers was the different attitudes towards teachers using physical punishment to solve conflicts. Some teachers were from countries where this is accepted, while the volunteers refused to accept hitting children as punishment. The following quote exemplifies this:

'We don't allow the children to use physical violence, or the teachers, and this is culturally different to what they know, and it is hard to instill limits in general.'

'We have had a few dramatic situations where a teacher used physical punishment and we had to decide what to do'

From our interview data, we learnt that youth leaders who initiated and ran the school, from Israel, also described complex national-racial conflict between the Arabs and Jews in their staff. The Arab volunteers often identified with the Arab teachers, for example, on the issue of physical punishment, rather than with the views of the Jewish volunteers. Additionally, the Jewish volunteers initially experienced political hostility from the Arab parents and teachers, who were distrustful of them being Jewish–Israeli. Thus, ethnic and cultural conflicts were dominant on all levels of the school, between children, volunteers and teachers. Other issues of conflict were if the refugee-teachers should receive stipends (or not, like the volunteers). This was successfully negotiated so that they would receive stipends. This example shows the possibility of using discussion forums to change the systems within the school.

Positive relationships: Students

This theme also included intense and positive relationships, that were described as a very central theme. This was apparent in interviews, and from observation between teachers, teachers and the youth workers as well as between the children. For all of the children, both older and younger, the relationships with the teachers were a central theme: 'I like the teachers - our teacher, I love him', 'I love my teacher; he knows good games', and 'I like to play with my teacher - he understands my language'. The older children also liked their teachers and saw them as positive role models and as helping them negotiate their parents' limits, as seen in this quote: 'The teachers help us negotiate things with our parents, so that we can go out'.

Positive relationships with other children were also a central theme. The children also described the importance of making friends at school in the following quotes: (Figure 4).

'Each day we come to school to find friends.'

'The children are good and fun.'

'I wait to play games with my friends…we fight, but then we make up, the teachers help us make up, all the time, we make up.'

'I like playing football in the breaks.'

'Playing rope with friends is best; playing ball with friends.'

'I like sitting on the fence and watching others playing.'

'I love to play games at school.'

The interaction between the teachers and the other children enabled the introduction of games and a structured, monitored safe space to play and to learn latency aged games with rules. For the older children, the school was a place to explore romantic relationships and relationships of respect and affection, as seen in these quotes:

'I love a girl at school.'
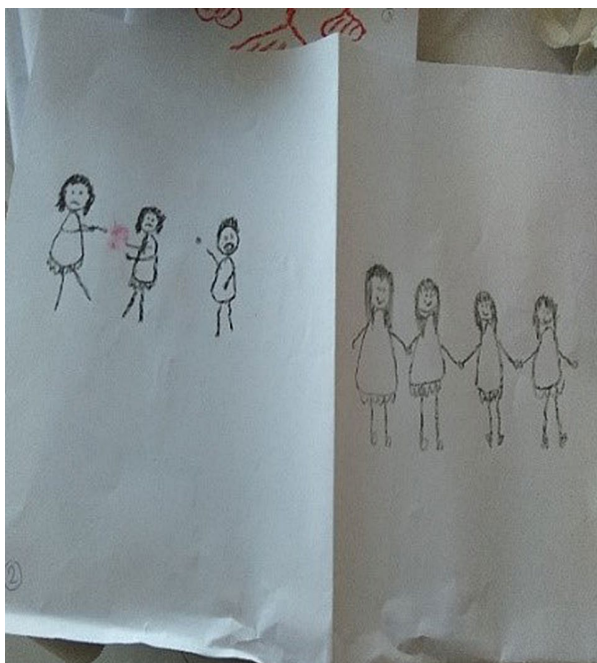
'I have made my best friend in the world here…'

FIGURE 4   Positive relationships

'I love my teacher.'

'I want to be like him when I grow up, a teacher.'

Positive relational elements: Staff

The staff also described strong attachments to the children. This can be seen in the following quotes:

'We become attached to the children - they give us a lot of love back.'

'When children leave, suddenly, and we miss them, we have no time to separate. This is very hard for us.'

'We have many problems also, so coming to school and teaching helps us to forget them.'

'I remember the value of education, so however hard it is to teach them, I know I want to fulfill this value and give it to these children who missed out. This value holds us teachers together.'

The focus of themes of the volunteers and teachers, who were all from different ethnicities and cultures, was on using dialogue to solve problems, and on investing time and effort to create relationships and good team work. This can be seen in the following quotes:

'We talk and talk, until we come to a solution, we know it will take time, we don't mind having conflicts, we are all together.'

'We spend a lot of time talking about our problems, we have many solutions to our problems when we work together.'

'We insist on long staff meetings that included fun and conscious relationship building, such as parties and meals, trips to the sea, and more.'

'We meet every Saturday without the children to run the school there is no headmaster.'

'We are all in charge together, we have to reach solutions to problems by Sunday when the children return.'

'We look together for creative solutions to these problems, we all have the same problems in the class basically.'

'We put a lot of energy into the parents, we sit and embroider with them, we make crafts, we invite them to school, and they feel they are part. We also work closely with the community center who support us.'

The second theme was the intense conflicts, and constant efforts to negotiate conflicts in the school on all levels. The safe setting, removed from the camp, and invested in as 'home' described in the first theme, may have enabled the children to focus on relationships, based on problem solving through dialogue, rather than the violence characterising the refugee camps. Thus, maybe the most central informal gain for the children was a change to experience a home that constantly confronts violence and conflict, rather than accepting or succumbing to it. This is a counter-message to the very base of being a refugee escaping from ethnic violence (Figure 5).

Theme 3: School curriculum and integrating the goal of formal learning into the school

Although the youth workers specialised in informal learning, the aim of the school was to teach what the parents most wanted, which was math and English. These formal studies were hard to undertake due to the different levels of the students, lack of training of the teachers and lack of textbooks, as shown in the following themes.

Difficulty teaching due to lack of experience, resources and knowledge level of the children

As compared to the above, then the teachers described maintaining this formal learning as a central challenge for them. This is exemplified in the following quotes:

'The children don't have basic background in learning, so it's very hard to teach them. They do not know the letters, they have never studied – I am not a trained teacher, [and so] this becomes very hard. We also don't have enough books.'

FIGURE 5   Values of multiculturalism and acceptance of the other

'It's hard to know where to put my efforts – what problem to solve.'

'I can't keep quiet in my class so that they can learn.'

'The children keep changing so I have to start all over again.'

'We need new lessons to teach, like history. We are always stuck on the basic things be-cause the children keep changing, and it takes them so long to learn…'

'We don't have textbooks – we don't have anything.'

Positive themes of formal learning as experienced by the student, teachers and youth workers

However, with all of these difficulties, the learning of math and English was cited as most important by parents, refugee teachers and the children themselves. The formal lessons were defined by the children as very important and as the most meaningful and popular part of school, as is seen in the following quotes:

'I love to learn English.'

'I like to learn numbers.'

'I am a good student.'

'My parents are very proud.'

Indeed, the children had nothing bad to say about formal studies. This was a surprise for the teachers when this theme was discussed with them, and it motivated them to continue. They explained that for the children's parents, formal learning is the only hope for the future that they have, and so it is a way to make the parents happy. It also provides structure. Observational data also pointed to the importance of a much-needed experience of normality for the children, providing structure that the children lacked in their chaotic experience of refugee lives with multiple traumas and transitions.

The volunteers, coming from informal education, understood the psychoeducational value of structure for the children, as is seen in the following quote: 'We understood the children need this, and the parents, and that it will help us teach- we made report cards, meetings with parents, clear rules about staying in class. We created together a structure' (Figure 6).

The teachers, as refugees themselves, also understood the deep hope that education and knowing English gave to the parents, and thus to the students, connected to their future dreams that they would be able to reintegrate into another European country. This is seen in this quote: 'This is most important for these children, and for their parents; we have to manage to give them these studies'.

From our observational data, it was clear that while all classes taught basic English and math, each teacher created a different environment in his/her class based on his/her personality and on the cultural norms of the ethnic group being taught. Thus, the African classroom used more singing, and the Afghani classroom was more formalised. This may have been due to lack of textbooks that forced the teachers to improvise, but it enabled an arena for culturally contextualised interaction with the students that enhanced a sense of normality and familiarity. When the teachers received some money, in light of this theme, they paid a Greek teacher who was an expert in didactic methods to help them understand how and what to teach the children so that they could catch up on reading and writing and learn English and Greek.

The first and second themes together, created a focus on a safe space to explore relationships and resolve conflicts in relationships between the different ethnic groups and between teachers, students and volunteers. The formal learning strengthened the feeling of structure and safety and provided hope for the future as well as intellectual stimulation. In terms of understanding the model, we can see that the energy that was put into the physical and relational elements of the model enabled the formal learning to be greatly valued by the students, even without books, materials and teaching skills of the teachers.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study present three interactive themes: the physicality of the school, the relationships within the school and the central goal of formal teaching. Each of these themes was shown to have negative and positive elements.
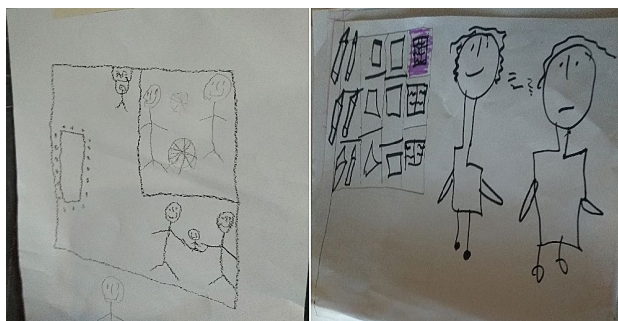

FIGURE 6 Organized play and formal learning as a space of coherence and predictability

In terms of understanding the model of this school, we can see that these three pinnacles, physical investment in the school, investment in non-violent problem solving, and focus on formal studies, worked synergistically. Thus, the physical, relational and formal elements of the school, or its ability to be a 'school', are inter-dependent. To elaborate, then we saw that overcoming the challenges of each of these three themes created circular, reciprocal relationships and helps solve issues in the other two themes. Thus, for example, overcoming the first theme, that of experiences of physical lacking, was achieved through focus on relationship building with the school through creative place making and working together to rebuild the school. This created better relationships. In other words, the investment in the school in terms of decorating it and setting it up as a 'home' described in the first theme may have provided a relationally safe space to focus on relationships and on problem solving through dialogue, rather than the violence characterising the refugee camps. The creation of a safe space and better relationships, in turn, impacts the third theme, the ability to learn formal content such as English and math. The first and second themes together (creative place making and focus on non-violent conflict negotiation) together strengthened the feeling of structure and safety and provided hope for the future, translating into motivation to attempt to study formal subjects even without basic background (since the children had missed school), and even without trained teachers or textbooks. One could argue that the physical investment in the school, such as painting it and decorating it, is a corrective experience of creating a 'home' for those in refugee camps who have lost their home. Within a home, the ability to solve conflicts non-violently is a basic family skill that is lost while living in a conflict ridden refugee camp. Thus, a model for respectful relationships is also restored. Creating a home and a set of positive relationships, in turn, allows the children to study, their developmental job as children. This, in turn, infuses hope back into the families.

The above model is described graphically in the following diagram.

Diagram no 1 here: Model of the school based on three central themes in data

Similar to the above, the data revealed how within each of the themes, the interacting stressors and efforts to cope with the stressors was also reciprocal. To elaborate, then we saw that the relationships were full of repeated and unresolvable conflicts, but also, full of positive practices and experiences. The teaching was very challenging, but the students were most proud of their formal studies. The findings show that it is possible to reach educational results also in this difficult context; This adds new methods and potential hope to the literature describing the general difficulty impoverishment of refugee camp schools (Coulby & Crispin, 2018; Hos & Cinarbas, 2018).

The overall intention of the school volunteers and teachers to deal with intense physical and educational lack of resources, together with cultural conflicts, rather than focusing only on academic content—but also not giving up on academic content, is what enabled the school to reach its academic goals, or in psychosocial terms, to move beyond the lacks, and to enable an experience similar to post-traumatic growth and a sense of efficacy in the teachers, as described in the above data. This is important in relation to the cultural clashes between Western NGO's and refugee cultures described in the literature above. It points to the need to include intercultural dialogue and conflict negotiation not only in African countries but also in Europe (Bird, 2003; Rutter & Crispin, 2012).

The aim of this paper is to provide a theoretical frame work for integrating formal and informal educational aims, as a base for a conceptual but also methodological model to inform researchers, and also educators, NGOs and others 'on the ground' dealing with these extreme challenges. It aims to provide 'bottom-up' knowledge from what is happening in the field.

With respect to physical elements

We see the importance of creating a different and 'normalised' type of space compared to the refugee camp, where the children can reconnect to their healthy memories of childhood. This creates pride and attachment to the improvised physical space of the school, even if it is allegedly very poor and inadequate. The theories of embodied aesthetic experience (Huss, 2016), placemaking and place attachment (Huss, 2009) can be used here to understand this phenomenon. In other words, while it may seem like a 'luxury' to focus on decorating the school rather than teaching English, for instance, we see here that this element is central to future learning. This physicality emerged as a central theme, following the conclusions of Rutter and Crispin (2012) concerning ownership and agency but adds the focus on creative placemaking and place attachment.

With respect to relationships, we saw a constant focus on resisting violence non-violently, while still setting clear limits, on making time to talk through and to negotiate conflicts, and to focus on positive relationship building at all levels. These actions enabled positive relationships to emerge alongside the conflicts. It created problem solving, pleasure in relationships and a sense of efficacy. The school becomes a place, not without conflict, but a place to learn how to solve conflicts. This becomes a correction for the refugee experience of ethnic and political violence as eroding their lives. We saw that the children could safely 'test' or even defy limits in the school. The use of dialogue, limits, formalised games in breaks and formalised studies were tools to 'hold' relationships and provide structure. The 'safe space' of the physicality theme helped create a setting for this. Furthermore, leadership effectiveness happens when there is a collaborative mechanism rather than an expert driven mechanism for the achievement of goals.

The final theme, mediated by the placemaking and relationship focus, enabled the participants to reach the central aim of the school, which was to give the children a formal education. From the children's data, we see that this was a central source of pride for them, although the teachers felt constantly challenged to provide it. This mirrors other studies that point to the importance of formal learning for refugee children as a source of hope (Bellino, 2018; Coulby & Crispin, 2018; Yule, 1998).

Another element central to this model is the interplay of ethnic spaces in classrooms and 'universal' spaces in the school as a whole. This enabled the teachers to be culturally relevant, positive role models, to manage the class in a way that was familiar to the children, and to re-create 'home'. At the same time, the universal spaces such as joint songs in break, the use of multiple language signs, and more enabled the children to experience space and respect for all groups and being part of the multicultural 'world' that they now inhabit in a positive way. This model echoes Greenfield's (1994) focus on the tension between ethnicity and globality/globalism that is so central to refugees' lives (Saulnier, 1996). While there is not much material about inter-culturalism and anti-racist education in refugee schools as compared to integration of refugees in European schools, this paper points to the need to address this subject that is at the base of refugee identity already in camp schools (Mason, 2002). Following is a more specific list of actions and stances used in this model.

In terms of the contribution of this paper to the existing literature on the subject, firstly, as stated, there is not a lot of literature on schools within refugee camps (Amthor, 2017; Aydin & Kaya, 2019; Daniel, 2019; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016; Oikonomidoy et al., 2018). Thus, this detailed case study helps to extend the literature. Additionally, it includes, as recommended in the above literature survey, the voices and experiences of the refugee children themselves, who's extreme experience challenges existing knowledge about children's psychoeducational needs.

The contribution of this paper is the creation of a theoretical pathway for setting up such a school in similar extreme refugee camp or post-disaster contexts. They highlight the need to activate relationships, placemaking and conflict negotiation so as to create a space in which school can work.

A methodological contribution of this paper is that the arts-based methods that captured the children's positive and negative experiences of the school, enabled us to understand the interaction between the positives and negatives that may have been missed in formal data gathering methods. The intention or expectation to deal with physical lack, social conflicts and lack of formal knowledge resources simultaneously, rather than focusing only on content or saying that schooling cannot occur in this context, is what enabled them to move beyond or to reach a stage of post-traumatic growth.

Overall, we see that the model created spectrums, rather than endpoints, between conflict and negotiation, between ethnicity and universalism, between formal and informal contents, between contents and relationships and between lack and plenty of both physical and relational resources. This triple model in effect follows the literature on enhancing resilience in schools (Brooks, 2006; Gow & Paton, 2009; Masten, 2011) and follows Antonovsky's sense of coherence model of the integration of meaning (conflict negotiation and schooling), manageability (physically creating spaces and managing conflict) and comprehensibility (understanding how people feel and what they need; Antonovsky, 1987). Thus, the place and relationships and formal learning worked synergetically to enable each other. This mirrors the developmentally appropriate model of a healthy childhood. That is, the refugee-teachers became role models and were also 'healed' to some extent by the children. This is a point lacking in the literature in relation to refugee-teachers (Amthor, 2017; Hos & Cinarbas, 2018; Nilsson & Bunar, 2016).

We hope that this description of the model will inform theories of educational frames in post-disaster and refugee contexts, as well as theories of conflict negotiation. Most importantly, we hope that it will provide tools and inspiration to help people set up ad-hock schools in similar post-disaster and refugee contexts.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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