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Pedagogical love in Finland and Australia: a study of refugee children and their teachers

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ABSTRACT

After claiming asylum, refugee children work to re-build their worlds across three dimensions: safety, belonging, and success. This article examines the pedagogical practices that support this work arguing that a key, but under-examined practice draws on what we have termed pedagogical love. Building on a qualitative Finnish-Australian study, we suggest that as refugee students enter schools in their host countries, pedagogical love can be created through teacher-student interactions in a range of ways despite limited shared language. Later, pedagogical practices that foster a nurturing classroom environment and help students to build a sense of belonging become increasingly important. As students settle in their schools and societies, teachers showing a belief both in the child and their contribution to their new society are crucial. We understand that these actions may be described as teachers' professional duty of care. Yet our findings show that teachers went beyond this duty by opening their minds and hearts to the students' lived conditions, engaging with their histories, and constantly shaping their pedagogy accordingly. These practices, we argue, are forms of pedagogical love.

KEYWORDS



Pedagogical love; refugee education; Finland; Australia; teacher-student relationships

Introduction

He [a refugee student in primary school] needs mothering, he needs fathering, he needs socialising, he needs – so, it's yeah, positive reinforcement, prizes and [a long pause]. I'll use the word love because I think that – that's what they need, ultimately. (Allie,¹ female, primary school teacher, Australia)

Allie was referring to a six-year-old refugee student who had been in her class for three terms. The teacher observed that the boy was not ready to start learning as his peers did. She hesitantly argued that what he needed was love, even though the interview question was about school context and learning, not about love.

Inspired by the quote above, this article opens a discussion on the many facets of love in refugee education. We do so while understanding that the notion of love can be 'slippery'. Its meanings can vary depending on the cultural and historical contexts

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in which it is employed. Moreover, it may seem a questionable term to use, particularly in school contexts where the presumption of a duty of care is a basic obligation placed on all educators. In this article, we make a case that the term 'pedagogical love' may be a usefully deployed to: describe engagements with children that extend beyond a duty of care into an attitude of calm, consistent, appreciative regard, experienced by the child as a form of devotional attention to their wellbeing. We explore how these actions are distinct from the basic caring duties associated with being an educator, and why these loving actions may be particularly crucial for refugee children.

Refugee children enter schools in their new countries within days or weeks of their arrival. They are suddenly surrounded by unknown children and teachers, a bewildering language, and possibly unfamiliar, local ways of working in the school (Biasutti, Concina, and Frate 2020). In our previous writing (Kohli 2011) we have noted that there are three interconnected dimensions that refugee children require when they arrive in a new country: the experience of safety, the growth of belonging with and to others, and the emergence of 'success' which, in school life, may emerge in its broadest sense as any kind of academic, social, material and reputational accomplishment that feels relevant for the child. These dimensions are co-constructed in different ways between the child and reliable adults in their lives, who in school contexts are often teachers. One could argue that these dimensions are necessary for all children to enjoy academic and social achievement. However, these dimensions are particularly crucial for refugee children since their pre-settlement education has often been disrupted and of low quality (Birman and Tran 2017; Dryden-Peterson 2019). Teacher-centred pedagogy (especially in low- and middle-income countries or origin or transit) with little attention to student needs or diversity is common, as is discrimination in school settings. Equipped with knowledge of these general experiences, as well as understanding about student settlement, teachers would be better able to identify refugee children's educational needs and potential, to help them learn the skills for classroom participation, to develop trusting relationships and to openly discuss what is needed for a safe, inclusive and educational climate in schools (Dryden-Peterson 2019).

This article draws on a large, qualitative research conducted with refugee students, teachers and school leaders between 2016–2019 in Australia and Finland. The larger study explored refugee children's experiences and understandings of educational achievement and the practices of educating that accompanied these experiences (Kaukko and Wilkinson 2018, 2020). In this article, we examine how the dimensions of safety, belonging, and success (understood in its broadest sense), intertwined in students' experiences and understandings. The quotation at the beginning of this article, which arose when a focus group of Australian teachers were explaining their professional duties in regard to refugee children, sparked a discussion for us as researchers about what 'love' might mean in education contexts. Given the acute awareness that Australian teachers in particular had about their professional duties towards children in the highly charged context in which they operate (Done and Murphy 2018), this teacher's deliberate use of the term 'love' to describe what a particular child needed suggests a potentially important lacuna in pedagogical discussions about refugee education. Hence, without aiming to conclusively define the notion of love or tethering that definition to a colonising and salvationist mentality shown by teachers, this article aims to open a pedagogical debate exploring

what the many facets of love may be in contexts of refugee education; how this differs from caring or rescuing, and why it matters.

Love, pedagogy and refugee children

Pedagogical debate has explored love as one of the positive emotions connected to the teaching profession (Chen 2016); a factor counteracting unfavourable external conditions in teaching (Choi and Tang 2009); as a disposition framing a teacher's work, including conceptual and practical aspects deriving from love (Yin et al. 2020) or simply, the very essence of 'good teaching' (Chen, Marshall, and Horn 2020) and 'good pedagogy' (Halpin 2009). These explorations use terms, sometimes interchangeably, such as pedagogical love (Loreman 2011; Määttä and Uusiautti 2013a, 2013b); pedagogy of love (Zembylas 2017); or loving pedagogy (Halpin 2009; Yin et al. 2020). While the terms and their interpretations differ, they share a focus on the relationship between (teachers') pedagogical practices and a range of caring, engaged and/or supportive aspects that can be connected to the notion of love. But 'love' like this never exists in a vacuum. People bring their backgrounds, genders, and ethnicities to all encounters, and their social, historical and political contexts prefigure how love can exist (hooks 2000; Nash 2013). In unequal situations, love can emerge as attempts to fight structures causing inequality, for example, racism or patriarchal domination, or as attempts to level asymmetrical power relations (Darder 2017; Nash 2013). In contexts of refugee education, love can be an educational response to the injustices connected to forced migration, and the disempowerment refugee students can feel in their new contexts. (Sellar 2020).

The diverse ways the word love is used, and the almost omnipotent hopes attached to it, carry a risk of love becoming mercurial and hard to pin down. To tackle this challenge, some scholars have attempted to define love by identifying its common characteristics, or alternatively, by breaking love into categories. For example, Hegi and Bergner (2010) argue that a common characteristic of love is that there is an investment in the well-being of the other for their own sake, that is, the other person in the relationship is an end rather than a means to an end. For Chabot (2008), love consists of connections among individuals who work together towards a common purpose while validating each person's uniqueness. This love is based on the experience of solidarity and connections with other human and non-human species on our planet. In practice theory, love has been conceptualised as 'a second order practice' (Schatzki 2017, 33): it draws on people's expertise associated with different contexts and situations. Unlike first order practices (such as completing simple tasks), it requires that both parties 'read' the situation, take risks and reach out to build connections between one another.

In educational research, one of the most often cited thinkers on love is Paulo Freire, who boldly argues that 'it is impossible to teach without the courage to love' (as cited in Halpin 2009, 89), and that education 'cannot exist in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people' (Freire 2017, 89). This view is echoed by bell hooks (hooks 1994, 2000), who argues that there can be no love without justice (hooks 2000) and that engaged pedagogy makes justice possible. Both Freire's and hooks' writings reflect their contexts: 20th Century Latin America and its class struggles (Freire), and contexts of racial and gendered discrimination in the USA (hooks). Yet what they argue applies to education across contexts: that personal connections and faith in human potential are at

the heart of pedagogical encounters, and that love in such pedagogy is composed of care, commitment, responsibility, respect, trust, and knowledge (hooks 1994). This love is political, public and relational; it is not transgressive, private, or physical. It is more than an emotion tied to the private sphere and home.

The more contemporary definitions of 'love' in educational research show how the word 'pedagogy' is understood. In some texts (for example, Daniels 2012; Hatt 2005; Lanas 2017; Lanas and Zembylas 2015; Määttä and Uusiautti 2013b) understandings of pedagogy resonate with broader Continental European/Nordic views of the 'upbringing' of the whole child (Kaukko, Francisco, and Mahon 2020). According to this view, as humans are not only knowing and doing individuals but also loving individuals, teaching should go beyond transmitting information and skills. Pedagogy, thus, should have an equal emphasis on transmitting love, in order to address the learner as a whole (Freire 2017; hooks 1994). In line with this view, Lanas and Zembylas (2015) argue that pedagogical love is an emotion entailing vulnerability and risk, a voluntary choice based on our ethical reasoning, and a response to others and to the world around us. This makes love a relational project rather than an internalised experience or a personal ambition, and a political practice influenced by its social, historical and cultural contexts. Finally, they argue that pedagogical love is praxis, meaning that 'love is as love does' (Lanas 2017, 565).

On the other hand, love as a set of qualities teachers can have or should learn, and which in turn can make teaching practice more effective, relevant or ethical, resonates with the understanding of pedagogy as 'the art and craft of teaching', or even more narrowly, as 'methods' of instruction. This view of pedagogy is more common in the Anglophone world (Mahon et al. 2020) and can be seen, for example, in Loreman's (2011) definition of pedagogical love as consisting of an educator's passion, kindness, empathy and intimacy; their capability for bonding and building community; their willingness to sacrifice, for example by advocating for students in the face of threats to career progression; and finally, teachers' ability to accept and forgive. Also Aytan (2014) refers to 'sacrifices' for the students as a form of pedagogical love. Yet, sacrificing in the name of love suggests that the teachers feel the demand to respond to students' needs, and view that it sacrifices some other part of their teaching practice. This contradicts the understanding of love as part of a more holistic view of pedagogy, always in flux in response to the needs of the person and the situation (Freire 2017; hooks 1994; Zembylas 2017)

There is very little research focusing on the role of pedagogical love in refugee education, perhaps for the reason that there is no reason to limit love to refugees, or any other particular groups of students. There are, however, good reasons to consider the special nature of teacher-student relationship, when the student is a refugee. Many refugee children come to their new schools after experiencing the death of ordinary living during times of war and disaster, and consequently, leaving many of their loved ones behind (Kohli 2011). Added stressors that can make their starting school journeys challenging include, for example, their possible past experiences of trauma, (Graham, Minhas, and Paxton 2016), gaps in prior education and limited literacy in their mother tongue (Birman and Tran 2017). Not surprisingly, many refugee students feel overwhelmed, stressed, lonely and excluded in their new schools (Baak 2019). Research literature discusses teachers' heightening the sense of responsibility and care due to these circumstances (Hägström, Borsch, and Skovdal 2020; Streitwieser and Madden 2019), but this duty of care can be argued to become love when the teachers do more

than the minimum to understand the children's lived experiences and current conditions, and shape their practices accordingly. This means that teachers educate themselves and are open for uncomfortable situations, for example when learning about students' traumatic histories. Hayward (2017) writes that although teachers' responsibilities are not remedial, caring pedagogical practices fostering safety and a sense of belonging can be experienced as healing. Such practices might be taken for granted by students who have not experienced insecurity or exclusion, but they can be poignant for refugees (Hayward 2017). Crucial for making this happen is that teachers have opportunities for professional development to understand and address the needs of refugee students, that they have the time and flexibility to depart from schedules and focus on the child, and that the whole school community is committed to this approach (Wilkinson and Kaukko 2020; Baak 2016; Frimberger 2016). When this happens, education can provide the scaffolding needed to regrow day-to-day rhythms and patterns for refugee students (Dryden-Peterson 2016; Pastoor 2017).

Despite all the apparent benefits of love, it has been noted that the requirement of love, or 'doing things from the heart' (Määttä and Uusiautti 2013b; hooks 1994), adds yet one more burden in the already demanding work of teachers, especially for those working with migrant or otherwise vulnerable students (Montonen and Lappalainen 2017). Love-rhetoric has also been criticised for carrying colonialist overtones (Drexler-Dreis 2019). In school contexts, it is seen as being at odds with what counts in contemporary educational systems, with their instrumentalist ethos and performance orientations (Darder 2017; Lanas 2017). In response to these points, the word love is often replaced with words such as engagement, emotion, positive school climate, or perhaps most often, with the concept of 'care' (see, for example, Goldstein and Lake 2000). However, we use the word love in this article because care/caring is understood in English as the 'practice of looking after those unable to care for themselves' (Oxford Dictionary 2020), that is, *giving* support. In contrast, love/loving is not based solely on gift, responsibility or a sacrifice. Rather, it suggests a more reciprocal, evolving and mutually constructed relationship between participants. It is a form of exchange without fixed goals (Hegi and Bergner 2010).

To summarise, the extant literature reveals that pedagogical love is a shape-shifting word: it is multidimensional, contextual and despite attempts to tie it down or solidify it into categories, remains somewhat liquid and elusive. On the one hand, what has been put forward as pedagogical love is conceptualised as a holistic, transformative and critical approach to teaching while on the other hand, a set of qualities teachers can have or learn. These views are not mutually exclusive, and as our examples show, that which has been posited as pedagogical love can be understood from both perspectives. In other words, the concept of pedagogical love suggests actions that go beyond a teachers' fundamental duties to provide caring support for students. We explore this key point in the sections below.

Contexts and methodology

This article draws from a study entitled 'Educational success through the eyes of a refugee child', conducted with refugee students, teachers and leaders in their schools in Finland and Australia in 2016–2019. The overarching aims of the study were to understand how refugee students view 'educational success',² and what schools and teachers can do to

better support the education of refugee students. While the research reported in this article is not comparative, it is necessary to shortly describe Finland and Australia as contexts of refugee education, and how their educational systems might have room for educational actions that suggests a form of pedagogical love. Australia has a long history of refugee migration, and its educational practices have been acknowledged as world class in supporting migrant students' wellbeing and belonging (OECD 2015). Finland, on the other hand, has a highly ranked educational system but until recently has been a country with low numbers of students from non-Finn-backgrounds. The official curricula in both countries outline a caring and engaged pedagogy through which teachers can support the integration and wellbeing of migrant and refugee students. For example, the Australian national curriculum names care, reciprocity, empathy and respect as aspects of ethical and intercultural capabilities (Acara 2020), and the Finnish National Core Curriculum (The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2014) calls for respectful, caring and positive encounters between people representing different cultures, belief systems and values. Both curricula stress that these capabilities should be promoted among students and modelled by teachers. Thus, the official aims appear to imply elements of pedagogical love, without using the word.

However, despite these policies, a major criticism of the Australian system is that its narrow measurement of student achievement against national numeracy and literacy targets has resulted in an instrumentalist focus on achieving higher test results over affective dimensions of caring, empathy and understanding (see, for example, Hardy and Lewis 2018). Hence, a certain type of 'doing' may prevail over a more holistic sense of 'being' and 'becoming'. Rather than emphasising testing, the Finnish education system values the affective side of teaching. In fact, 'love' was one of the key principles when Finnish public schooling system was started (Määttä and Uusiautti 2013b), and it has been argued that even today, Finnish teachers' work is driven by their committed to 'moral care by being fair and respectful toward pupils and by trying to nurture the whole character of them as human beings' (Gholami 2011, 148). However rather than juxtaposing Finland and Australia as contexts of more or less love, we note that schools in both countries vary greatly.

The fieldwork was conducted by the first author in Finland (2016) and by the first and second authors in Australia (2017–2019), following an identical data collection in both countries. Five schools in Finland and two schools in Australia were chosen, based on the authors' pre-existing relationships with these schools. The selected Finnish schools represent two regions with a high concentration of refugees outside the most frequently researched capital city Helsinki. Australian schools are located in the outer suburban area of a major city with a high concentration of refugee families and socio-economic disadvantage. Criteria for selecting the participants were that they had a 'refugee-like background', meaning they had migrated from countries listed as crisis areas at the time of their migration (UNHCR 2019), and they had been identified by their teachers as 'successful' in school. Teacher-led selection was chosen as the professional expertise and good student-knowledge of teachers is likely to identify students who are successful, that is, not only achieving or mastering academic tasks but also identified as being happy and 'flourishing' in school.

The chosen students (25 in Australia, 20 in Finland) were invited to participate in modified, child-led versions of critical incident interviews (Woods 1993). They drew and

talked about their school journeys starting from their countries of origin or transit, finishing with the current moment in Australia or Finland, marking all significant moments that had made them feel 'successful'. The difficult concept 'success' was opened up, by encouraging the students to think of any situations when they had accomplished something that felt meaningful for them, or made them feel happy at school (see more on children's views of success in Kaukko and Wilkinson 2020). The first author and students then explored the drawing with guiding questions such as: What happened here? What were you doing? How did it make you feel? What did you learn in this situation? Who helped you here? When the students mentioned other people, they were asked to elaborate on those people's roles, and why they were important. In parallel to these interviews, the first author conducted ethnographic school observations at one school in both countries. Teachers and educational leaders (12 in Australia; 6 in Finland) were also interviewed, focusing on their responses to the children's views.

The descriptions of the moments students chose as significant were first analysed by identifying themes that emerged in them, and then temporarily, locating the mentioned moments on the children's school journey (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana 2014). One of the key themes, focused on in this article, was how the teachers showed what may we called caring but which we call pedagogical love: the reasons we explore below. The temporal location of the moments (immediately or soon after the students' arrival; after a year or two; later) allowed us to see whether different kinds of actions associated with the possibility of pedagogical love were important at different stages of settlement. The staff interviews and observation notes were also analysed thematically, looking for aspects that complemented or challenged the children's views.

The average age of the students was 11, the youngest being six and the oldest 17 years old. The countries of origin of students studying in Finland included Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Uganda and Vietnam. Australian students came from Afghanistan, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Malaysia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. All Finnish teachers were of Finnish origin, while Australian teachers were more culturally and ethnically diverse. Ethical approvals³ were granted to report the participants' experiences on a general level, without identifiable references to their ethnicity or country of origin, or anything else that could compromise the anonymity of such small and possible identifiable groups of students and teachers.

Next, we present findings from the children's interviews, staff interviews and observations, structured according to the time dimension of the children's school journeys. The selected quotes from students and teachers are not intended to be generalisable or representative of the whole data; rather they are chosen to illustrate the key themes in relation to aspects of loving actions identified in this study.

Findings

The findings from both countries reveal that key teachers on refugee students' educational journeys show a range of pedagogical practices that can be attached to the notion of love, and the temporal analysis showed that these practices changed with time. So, while our aim was not to explore how *children* change with their settlement process, or how different *teachers* respond to those changes, our findings indicated that actions that can be analysed as pedagogical love diversely unfolded in parallel with the changing

needs of refugee students. Specifically, Kohli's (Kohli 2007, 2011) research with refugee children reveals that as they go through the settlement process, from the beginning stages of acclimatisation and adaptation to later stages of participation within host societies and absorption of contextual rules and markers, significant people can take different roles at different times in supporting the child. This seems to apply in both the Finnish and Australian school contexts. Teachers' practices scaffolded as the children moved along those stages. The professional duty of teachers, or any adult professionals working with refugee children, was to keep the students safe in this vulnerable situation. Yet the teachers' duty was *not* to generate an atmosphere where all students can feel a sense of belonging. It was also not a duty of the teachers to expand their thinking on what success means in the situation of refugees, and adjust their pedagogy accordingly. However, the teachers we interviewed, and the teachers mentioned in the student interviews, had done just this. The findings show that the stages of refugee students' settlement are accompanied by specific pedagogical practices that assist students in developing feelings of safety and belonging, after which other types of success can follow.

Creating pedagogical love

My teacher was very nice, so like, 'Whenever you need help, put your hands up.' And I was like, why? She was like, 'Put your hand up and say "help".' I was like, 'help', every day; I was just checking her, if she would come or not. (Elena, 12, female, in Australia)

In this quote, 'Elena' recalls her first stages in Australia and a teacher who made her feel safe from the very beginning. For Elena, communication took place without many words, with the teacher and Elena interacting in ways that assisted her to begin to feel safe, seen, heard and recognised. In this situation, both parties acted (testing, responding) without any guarantee of how the other would respond or commit. Elena reached out by raising her hand and kept doing that just to check that the teacher was there, and the teacher responded by consistently being there for her, without knowing why Elena needed her, or how she would react. 'Pirkko', a Finnish language teacher with over a decade of experience of working with newly arrived migrant students, elaborated on the importance of these early encounters:

They [recently arrived children], they hang on [roikkua in Finnish, also attach to] the teacher, in a good way. To anybody who goes through the trouble of explaining things to them. Slowly and constantly. And listening to the child, including them in the discussion, even though there would only be single words. (Pirkko, female, language teacher, Finland)

Through the above quotes, we can picture how pedagogical love was being created as a co-constructed practice; through active listening, asking questions that require single-word answers, and going to the trouble to make sure the child felt heard. In Elena's example, she was testing the limits of the teacher, and as she recounted, the teacher responded consistently in ways that reassured her. The attachment or 'hanging' was discussed by Pirkko not as a needy, troubled behaviour. It was described in a positive tone – as the children's way to physically reach out to the teacher who responded by staying close. We can put ourselves in the shoes of these teachers and understand how constantly checking on a child demands effort. It may be argued that this effort is all part

of the basic duty of caring that educators need to exhibit when working with all children, no matter what their backgrounds. However, what this argument overlooks is that in a country such as Australia, the major imperative for schools is to meet externally set testing measures that drive what is taught and how it is taught, with less and less space for the more affective dimensions of educating (Renshaw 2017). Thus, what may have been perceived as basic actions of caring assume a more significant and powerful role in teachers' pedagogical actions. Using Chabot's words (Chabot 2008, 813–814), these examples demonstrate love being shown with *discipline* in the teachers' practices concerning loving relationships; with *concentration* by slowing down and giving time and space to build meaningful ties; with *patience* to prioritise relationships over the immediate results or other things which may drive education, and *concern* to continuously nourish and develop the created ties. These instances are an invitation to be fluent in situations of uncertainty, knowing that as these situations unfold, each person can be an anchor for the other.

The observations and interviews revealed numerous examples of how teachers' calm and peaceful pedagogical practices, especially in the early stages of a child's stay were crucial in building a sense of security, belonging and safety. Another key element at this stage was the teachers' willingness to go beyond the classroom boundaries and get to know the student through their family network, thus gaining greater perception of the 'lived conditions' that underpinned their early immigration experiences.⁴ This was demonstrated by small actions that nonetheless took on a crucial significance in the children's lives. For instance, 'Helen', an Australian primary school teacher from an Anglophone background who had taught in the school for many years learned to do a student's hair in a way the family wished it to be done, so that the child could participate in a school camp. The student's own classroom teacher was hesitant to get involved in such a personal matter, but Helen happened to hear about the issue and wanted to ensure the student could participate. Helen went beyond her duties because she saw the importance of this small instance for the student's long-term participation in school activities. So, her aim was educational, not parental:

The good thing was, he was going to high school next year and there'll be camps next year. So I did it now but he's decided that he's going to learn how to look after his own hair now. (Helen, female, primary school teacher, Australia)

'Maria', a Finnish primary school teacher, working in preparatory education for immigrant students at the time of the interview, echoed the importance of these crucial, small actions and how they can help a child and their family feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in the school community. She explained how these actions were not driven by teachers' duty of care, but by their pedagogical responsibility for building foundations for the student's learning. Maria observed:

The single most important thing [in supporting the child's education in the early stages] is how we meet, the humane interaction, and how we understand the child as part of their family. And that in all educational situations the child gets a message that we carry/support [kannatella in Finnish] him or her as a whole. If we take the time to do that, that then supports learning. And that makes the child feel safe, the feeling that we care. (Maria, female, preparatory class teacher, Finland)

Getting to know families on a deep level is beyond the duty of professionals in both Finland and Australia, but a number of educators discussed how they went to great efforts to learn about the circumstances the broader students came from. As Ruben, an Australian teacher from a minority ethnic background noted:

These children [refugee students] do not come to school 'ready to learn' from a safe and secure environment. The learning at first can be a real struggle. But we can create those safe and secure places for them. (Ruben, male, teacher in a leadership position, Australia)

This holistic approach, in our view, can nurture the conditions for pedagogical love as a practice to take root and grow.

Sustaining pedagogical love

As time goes by and children begin to feel more settled, the initial actions that have made them feel safe can transform and become more complex. This became clear when looking at the role of teachers post preparatory education/English Language Schools. What is required from education and teachers also changes; the initial need to focus on basic needs, wellbeing and safety shifts into more goal-oriented content, more accountability, and full school days. Especially in Australia, school becomes filled with tasks imposed from the outside, such as standardised tests or packed curricula. These pressures take time away from the human interaction of education. Allie, the teacher who in the opening quote mentioned 'love', discussed how she perceived the education system to impose unfair and irrelevant tasks for refugee students too soon after their arrival. She noted that although those demands could not be changed, teachers still have control over how they approach the tasks, that is, in a more humane and relaxed attitude, that preserves the students' dignity. Allie noted:

They're doing these tests in their third language, and taking that moment sometimes when they were so stressed, I said to them, hey, don't worry, if we went to another school – some of these other more affluent schools or something – and asked the kids to sit down and do it in Dari, do you think they'd perform very well? And they were like 'no' and they all started laughing and I said, well, you're doing this in a second or third language. Don't beat yourself up if it's challenging. You're still learning. Imagine making me do it in another language – I wouldn't do very well. So, it's just really important to value them and show them how they're not empty and all that experience that they've had, it's made them who they are. (Allie, female, primary school teacher, Australia)

Allie's words show two things. First, they show an understanding of the deep-rooted, ideological presence of English as the colonial language (Freire 2014), and how the dominant mono-lingual, and at times mono-cultural, school practices might unintentionally silence other languages and cultural aspects. Allie actively resisted this, by embracing the students' pre-existing skills and languages in her teaching and encouraging all, including herself, to learn from one another (see also Wilkinson and Kaukko 2020). Moreover, she acknowledged that arrangements such as national testing are time-consuming and not necessarily beneficial for the students. This acknowledgement, and her more humane approach, were examples of resistance and agency in the face of extreme pressure for teachers to comply with dominant regimes of testing. Another example came from 11-year old 'Lily', who had arrived in Finland four years earlier. She

recalled her favourite teacher, who also acted in non-conventional ways and made her feel special:

Girl: I came to this class in Grade 3, and now we have 'Pekka'. He is nice, funny, and he gives us piggybacks, and sometimes he just grabs us and throws us on the coach.

Researcher: And you think that's nice?

G: Yes, it is, yippee! And sometimes he carries us so that we hang upside down. (Lily, 11, female, Finland)

This short quote offers a glimpse of Pekka's rough and tumble positivity, within a full interview that displayed a number of key characteristics and behaviours about committed teachers we have seen in our studies in both countries. He knew Lily's personal history, and her uniqueness. Knowing the students personally enabled him to create an atmosphere where everyone felt appreciated and included. It was not merely the piggybacks that made Lily feel special; the important thing was that Pekka made contact with the children consistently, engaging in ways that he had learned were safe and suitable in his classroom. This was enabled by the fact that teachers in Finland teach the same class for several years, whereas in Australia, teachers and groups usually change every year. The continuity in teacher-student relationships is fundamental to bonding with children over a longitudinal frame. It is about more than trust and good knowledge, it is about continuous 'parent-like' relationships in a school context, where a child can be understood deeply and in detail, and the teacher becomes the memory holder for that child (Hayward 2017). Such relationships endure, and over time develop their own pliable relational understandings between the child and teacher. For refugee children, many of whom have experienced broken relationships due to their migration, establishing a long-term relationship like this is at the heart of what we are terming pedagogical love.

While the student defined Pekka as an ideal teacher, she continued to explain that not all teachers could behave like this. Moreover, not all students appreciate such a physical approach, and not all educational contexts see it as appropriate. Physical touch is more limited in contexts of stricter rules of proximity where, for example in Australia, teachers carrying children would be out of the question. But other pedagogical practices may transform love into new shapes. In the Australian observations, we saw teachers dancing with students, throwing high fives, participating in mud fights and making contact in other, more distant ways. What distinguished these pedagogical practices from others was that they showed teachers intentionally shifting the emphasis from the content (what they were teaching) to the relationality, and by doing so at times when they saw it was needed. We identify these practices as bringing joy but also love to the encounters, and as important parts of teachers' pedagogical repertoire.

Considering our findings from Finland and Australia in parallel, we see that boundaries are drawn differently depending on the understanding of proximity and distance in our differing educational contexts. Moreover, the external pressures of testing and assessment were mentioned by Australian teachers as surmountable barriers for loving encounters. While school life after the initial preparatory phase is hectic in both countries, teachers had created ways within their busy school days to slow down, encountering their students individually, and building an atmosphere where everyone felt recognised. This can be interpreted as love shown not accidentally but by intentional acts of

consciousness emerging through social and material practices. (Freire 1998; Zembylas 2017). Some instances can also be interpreted as the teachers being ethically subversive (see Kohli 2007), for example Allie, who intentionally went against the grain of what was expected in her context by fighting the dominance of the English-only testing culture.

Transforming pedagogical love

Looking at the students' educational trajectories even further, we could identify yet another form of pedagogical practice, which we can link with love. 'Alex', an unaccompanied asylum-seeking teenager in Finland had had very little education in his country of origin, in the Middle Eastern region. He was 'sick of wasting his life', as he phrased it, and was thrilled to study in a secondary school in Finland. Alex wanted to get ahead in his life, and he had a very particular idea of how that would happen. Alex asked his teacher to do a Finnish spelling test for him every day, forcing him to learn twenty new, increasingly difficult words, despite the fact that he was sufficiently fluent in Finnish. The teacher resisted, but Alex insisted. So, the teacher let him decide, prepared the tests and guided him in how to memorise the words. Yet in the eyes of Alex, she did more than that. Her faith in him led to his faith in her. Alex recalled:

This teacher [in picture], she was nice. She always said that you will become better, even though I couldn't do anything, you will become better. Then I started to believe her, and I became better. She was nice. I liked her. — I believed her. (Alex, 16, male, Finland)

Although the teacher probably understood that there were more effective ways than rote learning, she respected Alex's determination. In the interview, he acknowledged and marked in his drawing that he appreciated how the teacher allowed him to take the tests even though other students did not, but what really mattered was how the teacher believed in him, and helped Alex understand that as he spoke three languages, he already *was* skilled. The teacher's belief in Alex's potential strengthened his belief in himself and gave him hope.

The language of pedagogical love could arguably be more appropriate to, and is more extensively researched in, early childhood education contexts (Cousins 2017; Määttä and Uusiautti 2013a; Page 2014), but Alex's memory of his teacher reminds us that pedagogical love applies to all and is never too late. The expression of pedagogical love evolves, depending on the child's age: there might be, for example, a growing distance between a child and the teacher as the child gets older. So while the bridge pedagogical love creates can change its forms, the fundamental structure is the same. Appreciating the proximity in latency and distance in adolescence, for Alex and his teacher, meant respecting the child's growth of independence – which for an attuned teacher means that she or he changes the expressions of pedagogical love over time as the child grows up. As one of the oldest in this reported study, Alex was moving into adulthood, and as part of this transformation, he considered a good education and strong language skills in a new country to be almost his last chance:

I don't want to waste time learning this language if I can do it quickly. I want to start my life faster. I want to be with Finnish people. I'm comfortable using my Finnish with some grownups [points to the teacher] who don't make fun of me. They believe in me, they motivate me. (Alex, 16, male, Finland)

The teacher represented a Finnish adult who trusted and believed in him. Alex clarified later that this belief in him was needed, because he constantly wanted to be extended academically, to reach ‘a place (referring to a mental space) which [wa]s further, with hard tests, hard grammars’. By this Alex meant that he wanted to push himself to learn difficult things, including the hard Finnish grammar, because he saw that as a way to get ahead in his life. The teachers, especially those working with older students, understood that they alone could not change everything; indeed, it is systems that should change, for example, to ensure more flexible educational trajectories for students such as Alex. However, this example shows how little moments of human interaction, where the teacher works with sensitivity and love, can impact a young person’s confidence and prepare him for the future. This teacher’s practices helped him to start transforming Alex’s life from an uneducated, unaccompanied child into a youngster who felt he was no longer ‘wasting’ his life.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we have discussed how pedagogical practices between teachers and refugee students include elements that we have decided to call pedagogical love. We have argued that in the process of arrival, building feelings of safety is crucial, and it can be created with few words. Later, as the students get used to the way their new school functions, teachers’ effort to meet the students as valuable human beings help them to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness in the classroom. As students had spent some years in Finland and Australia and were about to leave the school context, as in our last example, pedagogical love was shown by believing in the child, their capacities to do well, and their valued contribution to society.

Others may connect these examples with teachers’ duty of care, which is heightened due to their understanding of refugee students’ vulnerabilities. It is true that many of our examples, for example acknowledging and addressing the child’s or the family’s basic needs, can be interpreted as caring (c.f. Noddings 1995). We argue that *caring* becomes *loving* in teachers’ continuous efforts to learn more about their students’ histories, bear witness to their experiences and open their own minds to be educated further. Such love is not motivated by the teachers’ saviour complex or colonial dynamics, nor does it end in ‘rescuing’ the child. Instead, these actions are rooted in the teachers’ view of the students as ‘integral human beings’ (Darder 2017) with their histories, needs and dreams for the future, and the teachers’ professional knowledge of how they can address those needs with suitable pedagogical practices. The teachers did not discuss their actions as anything out of the ordinary, but our findings suggest that their opportunities to engage with students and their families were greatly dependent on the arrangements in their schools. For example, sufficient time, support from leadership and freedom to implement the curriculum flexibly were crucial. On the other hand, the actions also relied on a teacher’s own willingness and effort. In situations when the teachers felt constrained by arrangements (for example testing), their decision to take the time and teach in different ways (i.e., prioritising relationships over outcomes) was ethically subversive, and as such, a rather revolutionary practice. The revolutionary power lies in the way it speaks back to the well explored tendency in some contexts to reduce teaching and learning to technocratic, instrumentalist practices.

Refugee students' movements between safety to belonging to success cannot be taken for granted. Nor do these happen, for the most part, in a linear fashion. The stages ebb and flow within the lives of refugee children. Each dimension may appear and dissolve at different speeds, with varying results over periods of time. For example, a child experiencing physical safety in the classroom through the presence of a reliable teacher may also be experiencing danger in the community outside. The parents may be preoccupied with the legal safety of the family, and all members of the family may show different states of emotional turbulence, related to their past, their present, and their future. Similarly, a child may express an evolving sense of belonging somewhere and to someone during periods of establishing his or her presence within an unfamiliar context. Tentative and provisional aspects of legally belonging to a new country may occlude local aspects of fellowship and hospitality experienced by that child. Yet the dimensions of safety, belonging and success are reminders of some of the basic needs all learners have, but which might need additional support in the situation of refugee children. We consider that understanding the intricate and sometimes wayward movements of these phases is a key part of teachers' pedagogy, and teachers who respond to the interplay of these dimensions over time for each refugee child show a form of pedagogical love.

We acknowledge that the word 'love' is at odds with what counts in contemporary educational systems, with their increasing focus on the systematisation of educational practice. As noted, we also acknowledge that much what we see in the findings can be called teachers' professional duty, or caring. However, we argue that linking the word 'love' to pedagogy does not undermine teaching as a profession, or reduce teachers' work into 'caring' for their students. Instead, we believe it would amplify the sense that love in education is the breath of life and should be surfaced, explored and appreciated. More research is needed in order to understand the dynamic and fluid nature of pedagogical love, and how it may help to 'open ... a reparative stance that makes pedagogical space for love, hope, and possibilities' (Zembylas 2017, 34). This is needed when teaching students from refugee backgrounds, as well as teaching all students more generally.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms and background information on the children and their teachers has been kept deliberately general so as not to identify them.
2. 'Success' was explored in a broad and open-ended way consisting of any academic, social and emotional elements that have been relevant in the eyes of the child. The Finnish fieldwork used the word 'onnistuminen', deriving from the root word onni, happiness.
3. In Australia: The Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHREC) and the Ethics Board of Department of Education and Training, Victoria. In Finland: Departments of Education of the participating towns; voluntary statement from the Research ethics board of Childhood and Youth Research Societies.
4. We would like to thank the anonymous reviewer who provided us with this insight.

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