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Refugee education: a critical visual analysis

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ABSTRACT

Refugee education has become an issue of national and international concern as the numbers of refugees rise globally. In a world where global issues such as forced migration are communicated and consumed through the visual mode, understanding how discursive agendas are constituted visually is important. This paper explores the representations of Refugee Education, toggled with Refugees and Education with a focus on images available from a Google Images search. The analysis is framed by critical visual literacy, with the assumption that visual images are embedded in wider sociocultural practices and ideologies. Images of Refugee Education depict impoverished, teacher-centred classrooms, restricted knowledge and a docile population. Toggling with images of Refugees emphasises the racial otherness of refugee students, their numbers, and schooling as the means to contain the discursively constructed representations of refugees-as-threat. Toggling with Education emphasises Refugee Education as merely an issue of access, rather than quality, inclusive or lifelong learning as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 4. We conclude that images of refugee education undermine the quest for a compassionate inclusive education for refugees of all ages and that caution and critique are needed in the consumption of images.

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Introduction: refugee education

The extent to which refugees are meaningfully included in national education systems is dependent upon several agendas. These agendas reflect various competing international and national policy discourses. One prevalent discourse depicts forced migration as a ‘crisis’ for receiving societies. Since 2015, when the numbers of child refugees in Europe was at its peak, and until the recent war in Ukraine, a common trope within European public discourse has been of the ‘swarm’ of refugees, who represent a threat to national identity and security (McIntyre and Abrams 2021, 12; Saric 2019). Another discourse is of the economic impact of this forced migration, most notably in the Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom where the salvation of the National Health

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Service was depicted as being dependent upon greater control of immigration numbers. A third discourse is one of the refugee as an object of charity, 'a humanity fully reliant on Western emergency aid or rescue operations to survive and so inevitably dispossessed of will and voice' (Chouliaraki and Stolic 2017, 1167). In considering these discourses one needs to consider 'who is this a crisis for?' (McIntyre and Abrams 2021, 12) and what it means for societies when the term is used to manipulate (often populist) political agendas (cf Lucassen 2018). One consequence of these discourses is the dehumanising of the individuals, families and children who are forced migrants. Refugee children are caught within a 'multi-layered immigration-education performance nexus' (McIntyre and Hall 2020, 191) manifest in dominant discourses and often excluded from national educational policies as a result. Such positioning is in tension with human rights, equity and social justice agendas, reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Governments that have signed the Sustainability Goals 2030 Declaration (UN 2015) have committed to provide 'access to *quality inclusive* education including *lifelong learning* to all' (SDG4, our emphases). Various factors determine the extent to which SDG4 is realised for refugees in different countries. One factor is that of global testing cultures (cf Smith 2016). Education systems within destination contexts for refugees in Europe are often characterised by national policies that align with global trends towards an economically influenced model of schooling (UNESCO 2019). This model is marked by standardisation of education outcomes and fixed assessment regimes, which are used as markers of quality of education (Smith 2018). Students who are not able to conform to this standardisation are either positioned as outsiders or are invisibilised. This may mean that they are not included within models of mainstream education within the resettlement country. Such exclusion will inevitably impact their opportunities to pursue lifelong learning opportunities in their new context. Another factor is whether governments view refugees as temporary or permanent residents. These two options of residential status are theorised by Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) as a typology of a government's 'possible futures' for refugees within their contexts. This aligns with analyses of how attitudes to immigration are mobilised by governments in electoral campaigns, and how far the electorate would be receptive to a national policy of welcome for refugees (McIntyre and Abrams 2021). Public opinion, influenced by the media, may constrain 'effective and sustainable policies towards asylum seekers' (Ruhs 2022, 3).

The dominant way of consuming media is through online platforms with trends reflecting a significant rise in visual searches (Schwartz 2019). Easily accessible images inform public discourses, helping shape the public imagination about who refugees are, what they need from society and what refugee education looks like. Machin (2013, 347) reminds us that it is the 'multi-semiotic' nature of discourses through which naturalisation takes place. He argues that we need to pay attention to how 'discourses are translated into other semiotic forms and into social practices' by 'asking why this is done and what it accomplishes'.

To address this need, we conducted a Google Images search on refugee education from our location in the United Kingdom. We take a critical visual literacy approach that sees visual images as embedded within processes of production and interpretation, which in turn are embedded in wider sociocultural practices and ideologies. In other words, we are interested in the publicly available visual resources that represent refugee education. In this paper we show that when sets of images (ensembles) presented

by the search terms Refugee Education, Refugees, and Education¹ are read and are toggled, the workings of discourse within and across the ensembles are more clearly visible.

Our research questions were:

- How are Refugees, Education, and Refugee Education represented in Google Images?
- What insights emerge when one reads Refugee Education with images of Education and images of Refugees?
- To what extent are the aims of SDG4 realised or erased within these discursive constructions?

To contextualise our work, we first offer a brief review of the scholarship of refugee education in Europe, and of previous work on images of refugees.

Refugee education in Europe: inclusion and images

The literature on refugee education in European contexts encompasses education for refugees of all ages, from early childhood (for example, Bove and Sharmahd (2020)'s introduction to the *Journal of European Early Childhood Education Research Journal Special Issue* on this topic) and compulsory education (for example, Crul et al. (2019)), to higher education (for example, Ramsay and Baker (2019)) and lifelong learning (for example, English and Mayo (2019)). While simple access to education has been a focus (for example Crul et al. (2017)), most scholarship moves beyond access to consider factors that hinder or enable the inclusion of refugees in state education systems (for example, McIntyre and Hall (2020)). There has been critique of work that has focused on traumas experienced by refugee children and the accompanying portrayal of refugee students as victims lacking agency (Darmody and Arnold 2019; Rutter 2006; Saric 2019). This deficit narrative is counterbalanced by interest in the ways in which education can be a space for compassionate and inclusive responses (for example, Veck and Wharton (2021); Pinson, Arnot and Candappa [2010]). For a full consideration of the literature which explores the way in which educational provision can imbue safety, create a sense of belonging and success for refugee students, see McIntyre and Neuhaus (2021).

Interest in the visual representations of refugees intensified after the publication across news media of 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi who drowned during his family's attempt to leave Syria in September 2015. Analysis of visual representations of refugees is largely concentrated on images within journalism to understand how the photographs within media shape public understanding of the issue (Sacco and Gorin 2018; Vollmer and Karakayali 2018). For example, Zhang and Hellmueller (2017) found that representations of refugees within media websites fall into the categories of human interest, lose/gain, law and control, and xenophobia. Chouliaraki and Stolic (2017, 1164) argue that visual representations within headline images in newspapers 'fail to humanise' the actors within the photographs and that the main tropes are those of 'victimhood and threat'. Images of refugee children are composed to evoke empathy towards the young child who needs the viewer's aid. Kedra and Sommier (2018, 27) discuss the visual coverage of refugee children in journalistic photographs finding that such images 'can elicit compassion for children ... legitimize

the act of crossing borders, and define the “crisis” as the situation and not the refugees themselves.’ Pandir (2019, 411) argues that images of refugee children are usually used to evoke representations of the ‘ideal victim’ deserving of the viewer’s compassion. This paper contributes to and extends this body of work by explicitly focusing on the discourses embedded in the visual representations of refugee education.

Methodology

The methodological approach followed that of two of the authors in their previous critical visual analysis of Google Images of inclusive education (Walton and Dixon 2022). Similar steps of data collection were followed to establish the dataset, beginning with clearing cookies and caches on Google. Deliberately using quotation marks to generate exact matches, three separate searches were conducted using the terms Education, Refugees and Refugee Education within Google Images. The first 25 images (without repeats) for each of the three search terms were identified, and screenshots of these were taken. The rationale for this sample size is informed by Jacobson’s (n.d.) research that viewers do not tend to scroll beyond the first few pages of images.² Also, search engine optimisation principles rank texts with the highest levels of visibility first, thus (re)constituting dominant discourses in these visual ensembles.

The analysis is grounded in semiotic analysis with an aim of understanding the ways in which the meanings images acquire come from being enmeshed in ‘larger epistemic and ideological configurations’ (Dussel 2019, 7). We analysed the data in three stages, first using Serafini’s (2011) Noticings-Meanings-Implications Chart to provide a broad description and classification of the features we noticed in each data set. Each author then worked with the images generated from one of the search terms and conducted a detailed visual content analysis (Bell 2002) to generate a precise account of patterns and absences. Content analysis on its own, however, does not provide sufficient insight into ideology. We then applied Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) tools for visual analysis to identify the ways in which the ‘complex ensembles of discourses’ work ideologically (Kress 2010, 13). We acknowledge that Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework has been criticised for being overly complex, lacking empirical evidence and too western in orientation (Bateman 2008; Forceville 1999; McCracken 2000) and its logocentric origins do not capture ‘material form[s] of expression’ (Ledin and Machin 2019, 502). Mindful of these limitations, and aware that visual analysis is a subjective and interpretive exercise (Banks 2018), that is dynamic and provisional in nature (Bateman and Wildfeuer 2014), we worked together to validate our interpretations and secure consensus. We also ensured that the image analysis was sense-checked against our noticing and content analysis and informed by the literature. Finally, drawing on what we had learned from the individual image sets, we systematically read images of Refugee Education with images of Refugees and then with Education.

Kress and van Leeuwen’s (2006) tools for visual analysis are based on Halliday’s (1985) work on critical discourse analysis. Using Halliday’s (1984) configuration of meanings, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) work with representational, interactional and compositional metafunctions (see Figure 1). Representational metafunctions refer to the ways semiotic systems can represent objects, people, places and their relations in the world (e.g. identifying who is in Figure 1, what are they doing, what objects are



Figure 1. An image of refugee education. Not all of the images within our datasets have a creative commons license and so this exemplar image (which does have a license) has been chosen because of its similarity to those within our data. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/unicefethiopia/16085158782>. USF Board members visits Ethiopia ©UNICEF Ethiopia/2014/Ose.

present, where are they?). Representational structures can be narrative and conceptual. Narrative processes are connected by vectors showing participants doing something to or for each other. **Figure 1** is a narrative image, the girl's arm is a vector that draws the viewer's attention to the act of writing in her schoolbook. Participants in conceptual representations are more generalised with a static and timeless essence (in terms of class, structure or meaning) (see **Figure 3**). We argue that while individual images can be identified as narrative or conceptual, when they are read as an ensemble (like Refugee Education), the repetition of elements operates at the level of general abstractions representing particular social constructs.

The interactional metafunction focuses on relations between the viewer and the image producer. We looked at three elements of this metafunction. The image act deals with the gaze of participants (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Participants who gaze directly at the viewer (called a demand), set up an imaginary relationship between the two. When they do not, this gaze is considered an offer. The first row of children in **Figure 1** are set up as objects of information or contemplation. Social distance, like offers and demands, indicate relations between viewers and participants. These are realised through a continuum of extreme close shots to long shots. The closer the shot the more intimate the relation (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). The mid-shot in **Figure 1** creates distance between the viewer and the participants. Point of view is connected to perspective and the angles at which participants are represented. Frontal angles represent involvement, oblique angles detachment, high angles give the viewer power as illustrated in **Figure 1**, and low angles give the participant power. The compositional metafunction comprises information value, salience and framing to integrate the representational and interactive elements as a meaningful whole. Information value relates to the placement of elements

into zones, salience relates to images that draw a viewer's attention (e.g. the schoolbook) and framing connects or disconnects image elements to signify levels of belonging. Framing is absent in [Figure 1](#) with the effect of emphasising a group identity.

Bernstein's (2000, 12–13) concept of framing in education is used to discuss the visual analysis. Framing is about 'who controls what' and refers to 'relations between transmitters and acquirers' and it can be stronger or weaker. Framing regulates two rule systems. First, it governs the 'social order', that is, hierarchical relations and 'expectations about conduct, character and manner' in the pedagogical relationship and is thus the 'regulative discourse'. When framing is stronger, labels for acquirers will be 'conscientious, attentive, industrious, careful, receptive'. When framing is weaker, acquirers will be expected to be 'creative, to be interactive, [and] to attempt to make [their] ... own mark'. Second, framing governs the 'discursive order' which is the 'selection, sequence, pacing and criteria of the knowledge' and is called the 'instructional discourse'. For Bernstein, the regulative discourse is the 'dominant discourse' as the instructional discourse is 'always embedded' in the regulative discourse. The value of these Bernsteinian concepts in visual analysis has been demonstrated by Chawla-Duggan's (2016) work on Indian slum school settings, where a strongly framed educational context is visually evident. In the discussion that follows, we will show that the images of Refugee Education suggest a strongly framed regulative and instructional discourse, particularly in comparison to education that is not associated with refugees.

The visual analysis of refugee education

To focus the discussion of our analysis, we present representations of who refugee education is for and where it takes place, and how and what refugee students learn.

Who is refugee education for and where does it take place?

A representational analysis indicates that of the 25 images, one is a conceptual image and 24 (96%) are photographic narrative images with human participants. Although we recognise that race as a social category is highly problematic, we immediately noticed (Serafini 2011) the racial profile of the participants. Of the 24 images with human participants, 11 (46%) are of only black African or Caribbean participants, 10 (42%) are of only brown Middle Eastern or Asian participants, 3 (5%) are long shots where the participants are too distant to identify and one (4%) shows multiple races in the image. Black African or Caribbean participants are disproportionately represented in images of Refugee Education in relation to their representation in global refugee populations. In 2020 the highest numbers of forced migrants originated from Syria (6.8 million), Venezuela (4.9 million), Afghanistan (2.8 million), South Sudan (2.2 million) and Myanmar (1.1 million) (UNHCR 2020). White refugees are largely absent from the images.

All 24 images with human participants feature (mainly young) children. Only six (25%) feature an adult (in a teacher role), and the rest are composed of only children. The conceptual image is a stylised graphic where the numbers of refugees in education are represented by child-like representations of brightly coloured crayons. While we see this focus on children as evoking echoes of Pandır's (2019) point about images of refugee children as victims deserving of compassion, we also note that this depiction

erases older children and adults in refugee education. The experience of refugees in further, higher and life-long education is negated. This negation persists despite international interest on refugees in higher education as illustrated in Ferede's (2018) background paper to the Global Education Migration Report. It was not possible to confidently identify and count gender in many of the images, so while we acknowledge that the experience of refugee education is gendered (Hattar-Pollara 2019), we are not able to make assertions about gender from our reading of the images.

Participants in only three images gaze directly at the viewer and present a demand. The rest make no demand. Social distance is reinforced by the use of mid and long shots in all images with human participants. The image act and social distance work together to objectify the participants in the viewer's dispassionate gaze. The participants require nothing of the viewer beyond confirming that they are in classrooms and accessing education.

Refugee Education, according to this ensemble, takes place in overcrowded settings offering limited resources. Twenty-one (88%) of the 24 images with human participants are in identifiable classroom settings. The composition of the shots indicates crowding. In 17 (70%) of the images, students are in rows that move beyond the frame of the picture, and one long shot shows over 50 students crammed in a room sitting on the floor. This composition is reminiscent of the media depictions of 'swarm' of refugees, albeit contained in a classroom. Furthermore, the lack of framing in most of the images means that the children are not viewed as having individual identities and are homogenised within the group.

Ten (42%) classrooms are temporary or fragile constructions made from wood, canvas or corrugated metal sheeting. One of these classrooms is clearly in a refugee camp setting with UNHCR banners across the back wooden wall. Learning and teaching materials are salient in all the images. Eight (33%) images feature chalkboards (including one where the children each have a slate), and 11 (46%) feature books. These are all textbooks or exercise books where students copy notes from the board. There is an absence of reading and reference books, and classroom libraries. Pens, pencils and chalk are evident. There is little modern technology with only one image showing groups of students looking at tablets.

Refugee Education is depicted as taking place elsewhere, and certainly not in Europe or other high-income countries. This is despite Europe being a significant refugee destination with nearly 5.2 million refugees arriving in Europe at the end of 2016 following the Syrian conflict (UNHCR 2022). This figure has increased with Afghans seeking asylum in Europe following the Taliban government taking control in 2021 (BBC 2022). The images are interchangeable with the stock photographs used by the media to illustrate education in 'developing' countries (for examples, see White [2013] and The Human Journey [n.d.]). Education in these countries is associated with poor outcomes and low-quality instruction (World Bank 2018), and these associations are carried into the depiction of how and what refugee students are learning.

How and what are students learning?

Refugee students enter a strongly framed (Bernstein 2000) educational space which is hierarchical, the power relations between student and teacher are asymmetrical and

the control rests firmly with the teacher (the transmitter). The spatial organisation of most classrooms reflects this strong framing with a teacher-fronted design. Five (20%) of the 24 images with human participants place the teacher at the front of the classroom using the chalkboard. Students are seated at desks or on benches in rows, or on the floor in lines in 19 (79%) of the images. This suggests regimentation and control and reinforces the asymmetrical social order of the classroom. Thirteen (54%) images have students looking towards the front of the classroom. In eight (33%) images participants display non-transactive reactions, looking beyond the viewer towards either the teacher or a board. Students' actions like writing in books, looking up while writing and sitting with raised hands enable the viewer to 'imagine' (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 68) that these students are copying from the board, completing a task or responding to a teacher's question. The postures and positioning of the refugee students present an idealised notion of the good student (Dixon 2011), looking to the teacher as the authority figure and the controller of the transmission. Students work on their own, but this is not independent work, it is controlled by the teacher. Even where the images shift to teachers working with individual students, the power relation remains as they are marking or pointing out something within the student's exercise book. Where the pupils have books, they are using these to record information in exercise books or to fill in sections of a workbook. There is little sense of enjoyment, with only one image depicting a smiling student. Together, the images are of conscientious, attentive, industrious and receptive students, indicative of a strongly framed regulative social order (Bernstein 2000). A strong regulative discourse has been shown to inhibit reciprocity in the pedagogic relationship and to result in a restrictive classroom environment (Kiramba and Smith 2019; Liu and Hong 2009).

The teacher controls the pedagogic communication in the images in a strongly framed instructional discourse. The curriculum is predetermined (through availability of resources) and pupils are given access to knowledge in pre-packaged chunks within workbooks or through what the teacher says or writes on the board. In all cases where the teacher writes on the board, the viewer is unable to see the text – usually because it is too far away, or the angle is oblique. This is privileged knowledge that brings enlightenment to students, as indicated in two images where the light (of knowledge) comes from above to cast a halo-like glow around the student. The use of exercise books in the images is a sign of performing schooling and literacy is a means of organising and regimenting learning. Knowledge is restricted or rationed and portioned out according to when the teacher judges the whole class to be ready to learn. The teacher's control over access to specialised knowledge is reinforced in three images that show children waiting to be given access to school. They are queuing outside, seated on the ground holding empty books. They are waiting for the books to be filled (see Freire 2007). There are no obvious signifiers that the acquirers (students) have any control over the selection, sequencing or pacing of the knowledge and there appears to be no opportunity for independent learning beyond what students are told, read, or copy in the classroom. In these ways, the visual reflects and reinforces a strongly framed instructional discourse which has dominated many African contexts (Vavrus, Thomas, and Bartlett 2011).

Our first research question asks 'How are Refugees, Education, and Refugee Education represented in Google Images?' In response, we argue that the ensemble produces a covert taxonomy (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) of homogenised, young, mainly black

and brown bodies taught within in a strongly framed regulatory and instructional discourse (Bernstein 2000) in under-resourced classrooms. There is very little that reflects classrooms with refugees in Europe, which might be expected from an image search conducted in the UK. Also, given the prominence of Europe as a major destination in global refugee migration, the disjuncture between these representations and the lived experiences of Refugee Education within European contexts is striking. The images convey Refugee Education as timeless and not shifting with global migration trends and occurring in far-off contexts. This distancing device is reminiscent of the development aid oeuvre where children are constructed as victims (Pandir 2019). This further works to erase the education needs of the individual refugee.

The visual analysis of refugees and education, and toggling with refugee education

In the section that follows, we consider findings which address our second research question: *What insights emerge when one reads Refugee Education with images of Education and images of Refugees?* We do this by presenting a visual analysis firstly of the Refugees dataset and then the Education dataset and explaining how toggling these search terms with Refugee Education images makes some features particularly striking.

The visual analysis of refugees

All 25 images have human participants. A racial analysis shows that 16 (64%) of images show brown participants, five (20%) show black participants, three (12%) have participants who are unidentifiable (as they are in silhouette or too distant) and only one image (4%) shows multiple races. There are no white participants in these images. Twenty (80%) images show adults with children and five (20%) feature only (young) children which is reflective of the range of refugee populations. This ensemble of images foregrounds middle eastern/Asian refugees. This aligns with the racial composition in the UNHCR report (2020) cited above. The images correspond to the media representations of there being a mass of refugees swarming to leave their countries of origin as identified in the literature. In 19 (76%) images, it is impossible to count the number of people. It is difficult to see the faces of the participants and to connect with them as 21 (84%) of the images are long or very long shots (see Figure 2).

Refugees are depicted as transient (Dryden-Peterson et al. 2019) in many images. Sixteen (64%) images show participants in transit, journeying either across land or sea. Four (16%) depict boats and water. Rather than being settled in established housing, 24 (96%) of the images portray participants in harsh outside contexts. Those who are in or near a settlement camp are depicted as queuing or waiting, with six (24%) showing long lines of people. Transience is reinforced by the visual metaphors of tents (in seven (28%) images) and carrying bags or cases (in eight (32%) images). These visual metaphors (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) in the ensemble present a narrative of displacement as refugees who never settle, attend schools, go to work and rebuild their lives.

Only four (16%) images have participants who make a direct demand of the viewer so the trope of refugees as needing aid is not as strong as the depiction of refugees as a large mass of people coming towards the viewer. What is striking about these images is the



Figure 2. An image of refugees. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/vfutscher/42322119744>. Creator: Massimo Sestini | Credit: Polaris.



Figure 3. An image of education. Not all of the images within our datasets have a creative commons license and so this exemplar image (which does have a license) has been chosen because of its similarity to those within our data. <https://pixnio.com/objects/books/literature-design-book-colorful-color-paper-learning>. Creator: Pixel2013 Credit: PIXNIO.

depiction of the loneliness of the refugee within the mass. For example, one features a small child looking bereft, on the edges of the camp with no other human participants in shot but a background of tents going as far as the eye can see. The child is not looking at the viewer. Only one of the images depicts actors who are smiling, this is an image of four children looking up at the camera engaged in an arts activity around a table. For the other images, viewers are bystanders observing the harsh conditions of either the journey or the destination.

Toggleing refugees with refugee education images

Reading the visual ensemble of Refugee Education with that of Refugees enables several insights. The first is that refugee education continues the discourse of the refugee as the racialised Other. It is notable that Black African and Caribbean students are represented in higher proportions in Refugee Education images than in Refugee images. Second, Refugee Education is for young children, and the older children and adults who accompany them in most of the Refugee images are erased and their educational needs are ignored. Third, the classroom walls as a compositional element that frame Refugee Education images, take on greater significance when read with Refugee images. While the trope of the Refugee swarm is evoked in the crowded classroom, the classroom walls suggest that education is a means to contain the swarm and limit the threat. When compared to the unframed outdoor contexts of Refugee images, the classroom walls limit education to formal schooling environments. Finally, Refugee Education images, with their dilapidated and makeshift classroom structures, reinforce the transience and impermanence portrayed in Refugee images. This confirms the view that Refugee Education takes place somewhere else and because of the social distance and lack of demand in most images, there is no expectation of a response from the viewer. This is not the compassionate and inclusive vision for refugee education articulated in writings from the European context, for example, Arnot, Pinson, and Candappa (2009) and McIntyre and Neuhaus (2021).

The visual analysis of education

A representational analysis shows that of the 25 images of Education, nine (36%) are conceptual representations and 16 (64%) are narrative representations with human participants. Of these 16 images, eight (50%) show racially heterogeneous participants, 6 (38%) show only white participants, and one is of Asian participants and one of Middle Eastern participants. Read as an ensemble of images, Education is represented as inclusive in terms of racial diversity but with whiteness as a dominant marker because of its overrepresentation in this data set. In the 16 images with human participants, eight (50%) show adults with children or young people (seven are teachers, and one is an adult helping children with homework), and eight (50%) images depict only children. The majority of these 16 images depict children in primary or secondary classrooms with two images possibly reflecting a higher education context.

Twenty-one (84%) of the 25 images of Education reflect spaces where educational activities take place: classrooms (14 images or 56%), libraries (three images or 12%), at home (one) or in an examination venue (one). The remaining six (24%) images are decontextualised graphics and a close-up of a study group. As an ensemble, the images reflect a range of educational resources that include books, textbooks, student exercise books, pens and pencils, posters or charts on classroom walls and technology that includes laptops, tablets and a smartboard. The classrooms are light and spacious, with big white framed windows appearing in several images, the classroom furniture is modern and white or made of light wood. Although the majority of images are mid- or long-shots that do not capture all the participants in the room, these learning spaces are not overcrowded. There is an average of four people in each image. The spatial organisation reflects traditional classroom rows; however, students are allocated

to well-spaced individual desks of sufficient size to spread their schoolbooks. In nine of the 16 images with human participants, the bokeh effect works to sharply focus students in the foreground whilst others are blurred into a background, emphasising an education that benefits individuals rather than the masses. The quality of this education is assured by testing. One image clearly shows a formal examination, and some of the images of individual work could also be read as test-taking.

Education images indicate weakly framed instructional and regulatory discourses. In six of the 16 images with human participants, the students are doing some form of individual independent work. One image shows independent group work. These suggest that the students (acquirers) have some control over the sequencing, selection and pacing of the pedagogic communication. The pedagogical relationship is less hierarchical. Only four of the 16 images reflect a teacher-centred pedagogy with a teacher-fronted classroom. These images are balanced by four images of teacher-as-facilitator listening to or giving feedback to small groups or individuals.

It is significant that over a third of the images of Education do not have human participants but are conceptual in the form of drawings or still life photographs (see [Figure 3](#)). A generalised stable essence of Education manifests in decontextualised backgrounds and the information value of their composition. All nine images have a book or books positioned on the bottom horizontal axis depicting the Real (what is) (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006). Rising up from the books to fill the top half of the image are a range of visual metaphors of apples, globes, the tree of knowledge, formulae, graduation certificates and mortarboards. These work at an emotive level representing the Ideal (what might be) (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, 186). The ensemble of Education images offers a view of education where different forms of knowledge are accessed through multiple textual resources. Education offers infinite possibilities and the potential for individuals to harness knowledge for the future.

Toggleing education with refugee education images

Reading the visual ensemble of Refugee Education with that of Education enables further insights as a result of absences and congruences. First, is that Refugee Education is confirmed as the providence of the Racial Other and located in liminal spaces of transit. Refugee Education takes place in mostly racially homogenous settings and is delivered in contexts of poverty that work to contain the swarm motif of populist discourses. By contrast, images of Education depict a limited racial diversity where whiteness and a middle-class context are dominant. Second, the images suggest that Education is for the individual, with relatively few, clearly defined students in each image but Refugee Education is for the masses, in crowded classrooms where the features of many students cannot be discerned. Individualism is a 'core assumption' of the global testing culture, where it is 'linked to personal effort, with test scores evaluating personal effort and ability' (Smith 2018, 93). Third, without an individual focus, or reference to assessment, the quality of Refugee Education is rendered dubious. The issue of quality is brought into sharp relief when the poverty context of Refugee Education is read against Education. The Education images depict well-designed comfortable spaces for learning with sufficient and appropriate educational materials that facilitate independent learning. These are absent in Refugee Education. Finally pedagogical practices in

Education reflect possibilities for creativity and interaction with peers and materials that build individual agency in pursuit of knowledge. This is in contrast to the passively attentive students in Refugee Education who receive knowledge from a teacher. Refugee Education is bounded in space and time while Education is about boundless and aspirational futures.

Refugee education and SDG4: implications of the visual analysis

Our third research question demands a reading of the discourses through the lens of SDG4. It is evident that the images of the Education ensemble represent an idealised and not unproblematic vision of diverse and quality education leading to future-orientated lifelong learning possibilities for all students. In these ways, the ensemble superficially accords with some of the intentions and ambitions of SDG4. The ensemble reflects what might commonly be found in high-income contexts (Vavrus, Thomas, and Bartlett 2011), such as those in many European contexts. This is in marked contrast to the ensemble of Refugee Education which represents access to a restricted pedagogy with no quality assurance measures, a homogeneous peer group and no future orientation. Earlier we argued that refugee children are often caught in an ‘immigration-education performance nexus’ (McIntyre and Hall 2020). Within the visual representation of Refugee Education, the refugee students do not appear to be integrated into society within a resettlement context, nor are they participating in performance regimes which are constructed around notions of markers of quality education in host contexts in the Global North.

In a world where global issues such as forced migration are communicated and consumed through the visual, it is important to think critically about the ways in which discursive agendas are constituted visually. This is particularly pertinent as we reflect upon the images of the Ukrainian refugees in European media. Across Europe, countries have opened their borders and their classrooms to welcome Ukrainian refugees. Currently there are 6 million forcibly displaced Ukrainians (BBC 2022) who have largely relocated within Europe. This reality is not yet signified in an updated visual ensemble of Google Images searches carried out in May 2022. There are still no discernible white participants within the first 25 images within the updated Refugees and Refugee Education ensemble.

In conclusion, our analysis shows the ways in which we need to consider how discourses are inscribed or operate across multiple modes. The challenge is thinking beyond the limited possibilities presented here for alternative, more socially just and realistic representations of what inclusive refugee education could look like. The consequences of not doing so impedes moves to reframe the refugee student from the current status of outsider; limits opportunities for changing the dominant discourses and competing educational agendas; and ultimately limits the potential to influence policymakers’ attention towards a more inclusive and holistic approach to refugee students.

Notes

1. Search terms are capitalised to distinguish the ensemble of images from more general use of these terms.
2. While important, it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the productive function of the Google search engine algorithm

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