

RARITAN VALLEY COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WHAT ARE THE ETHICS OF WEALTHY NATIONS PROVIDING REFUGEES OF
OTHER REGIONS OF THE WORLD WITH ELL COURSES?



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“I know what it's like when you are a refugee, living on the mercy of others and having to adjust.”(Ahtisaari Finnish Politician) The question of whether wealthy nations have an ethical responsibility to teach refugees English through ELL classes is a hard question to answer. Nevertheless, a topic that has many people thinking.

The determination of the Supreme Court and the opinion of Bashar Hariri about the ethics of refugees being able to understand English using ELL courses helps explain why certain members of the family struggled when they first arrived in America.

“There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education.”(NCELA Supreme Court Online). The online resource provided on the NCELA (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition) website outlines that about 5 million students in the United States of America’s education system do not know English well enough to obtain an adequate education. They use case law, from judicial bodies such as the Supreme Court, to affirm that students need to be able to understand English to benefit from schools that teach using English. In other words, if two people are given a set of tools and one knows how to use them while one does not, they are useful for one and useless to the other. The Supreme Court’s point about students who do not understand English being “foreclosed” from education helps one understand why Amal and Naji have a hard time understanding and following instructions during class in ‘Welcome to the New World’. On pages 56 to 57 in the book ‘Welcome to the New World’ Amal and Naji showed the effect of not understanding English on students who don’t know English

very well. They were instructed on the activity all the students would be participating in during gym class. They were confused because they did not fully understand what their teacher said due to their poor understanding of English. The quote from The Supreme Court helps us understand what went wrong in this passage of the book. Their misunderstanding stemmed from being presented with the same instructions as the other students, but their lack of understanding resulted in Amal running in circles.

Additionally, Bashar Hariri's argument that assisting non-English speaking refugees learns English while learning job skills helps one realize why Ibrahim chooses to first and foremost look for a job instead of building a foundation and planning more long term by prioritizing English and marketable skills. "The study suggests that refugees can be enrolled in vocational schools, where they can establish their career and learn English at the same time..."(Hariri iii) Hariri's peer-reviewed paper explains that refugees face many challenges when they begin to resettle in a new country. These struggles can range from adjusting to the culture, to finding a job and stability in their homes. He proposes a couple of solutions to the complicated variety of challenges faced by refugee families, specifically Syrian refugees. His first solution is for parents to learn English and job skills simultaneously. His other solution is for their children to be taught by ESL teachers who speak Arabic. That is to say, refugees do not have to sacrifice learning English to prepare to work or vice versa. They can do both efficiently if the right system is in place. On pages, 39 to 43 in 'Welcome to the New World' volunteers help refugee families meet with the family to tell them what needed to be done for them to be independent and a part of American society. The kids were told to focus on learning English and going to school, while their parents were told to focus on

finding work. As the volunteers left, they mentioned that their lack of English may be a problem. I can connect this passage with the quote from Hariri's Thesis because if they were aware of the aforementioned method of learning a marketable skill and English at vocational school, they may have been able to create a better long-term plan than just finding work.

"...the persistence of deficit discourses of ELLs, even when critical pedagogy shapes SEI instruction, indicates the need for more experience with ELLs and working with mentor teachers that model asset-based approaches."(Hafner Online). Hafner's article is the product of a 3-year study that researched the practicality of implementing critical pedagogy in courses like ELL classes. It also investigated whether they received an equal education to non-ELL students. Their findings found that critical pedagogy was a viable way to teach ELL students and that they were not receiving an equitable education, academically or socially. In other words, people possess the notion that kids of poor backgrounds or that speak different languages do not do as well in school because of their differences. This can inhibit ELLs in school and life, therefore, a better approach for their teachers to take would be a way of teaching that focuses on their strengths, rather than their weaknesses to motivate them to grow. Andrew Hafner's point about how disadvantaged and nonnative English-speaking children are underestimated helps one understand why the children picked on the poor spoken child in their class and were surprised when his group that included Naji and Salam won the class competition. On pages, 87 to 89 in 'Welcome to the New World' Naji and his new friend Salaam walked into a usual class of theirs. Naji introduced them to a classmate named Wilson, a few classmates proceeded to laugh at Wilson because he did not

speak English well. The three boys bonded while competing with the rest of their class to build the largest tower using dry sticks of spaghetti and marshmallows. After winning the competition for the tallest tower their classmate seemed shocked at how well they did. This passage of the book can be connected to Andrew Hafner's theory because it shows children who are different because of how they sound being ostracized by other individuals for characteristics out of their control. By utilizing his advice and showing them their strengths and motivating them to constantly improve he is hoping they will be less discouraged by others' criticism.

Also, Matthew Richards' argument about how English as a Second Language (ESL) classes should teach health literacy to refugees helps one to realize why the mother and father in the book choose to focus on finding work and learning English instead of also finding health insurance for when they need routine or urgent care. "In addition to being victims of persecution in their home countries leading to their refugee status, refugees are also the victims of significant mental and physical health disparities here in the United States. Reducing and ultimately eliminating these disparities is a matter of public health significance both in Allegheny County and elsewhere, but addressing these disparities requires that we also address the low levels of health literacy found among refugee populations." (Richards Online). Richards' peer-reviewed article used statistics indicating a higher influx of refugees to explain why increased health literacy among these individuals is in the best interest of them and everyone in their communities and elsewhere. Meaning, refugees, and immigrants had and have many major life issues at the time of their arrival to the United States of America. To add to them, a lack of understanding of how to get help with issues about their mental and

physical wellbeing will negatively affect them and the individuals around them. There is an abundance of passages in the book 'Welcome to the New World' that show the parents and children becoming very stressed before, during, and after they immigrated to the United States of America as refugees. Before their immigration, the father of the family was taken from his family, tortured, and eventually determined his imprisonment kept him and his family safe, compared to the danger of being released and targeted again. This situation is likely to lead to health issues of the mind and body for his family and himself. During their immigration, the entire family was worried about the possibility of the presidential administration changing because they feared it would impact their ability to all seek refuge in America. After their immigration, they met many hardships ranging from the culture shock and the children starting school to the father finding a good job. These can all be connected to Matthew Richards' assertion that increased health literacy will help refugees without it. If the children increased their understanding of their options regarding healthcare they might have the ability, depending on the curriculum, to come home and offer their father a place to obtain healthcare for injuries obtained while imprisoned. Eventually, the children might be able to assist their busy parents with finding therapy services to help them cope with the many stressful situations they have encountered. And finally, the children might be able to help their parents understand their options for health insurance for their family, to avoid more stressful situations in the future of their residence in America.

I realize there are naysayers to the view that writer Jake Halpern accurately addressed the hardships of students not knowing English and their parents' lack of understanding why they should prioritize health insurance in his novel "Welcome to the

New World.” However, critical audiences fail to see that this novel is a fictionalized version of an actual family’s experience. Halpern’s depiction of the children’s difficulties in school and their parents’ concerns driving their priorities is consistent and appropriate.

In conclusion, I think wealthy nations have an ethical responsibility to teach refugees English through ELL classes. They have this ethical responsibility because refugees can and would be much better off learning English, children, and adults. It would improve their ability to learn, work, and live independently. In my opinion, the topic of refugees is highly political and emotional for most people. On this basis, I cannot predict whether the authors will be popular or not 10-0 years from now.

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