Interrogating inclusionary and exclusionary practices: Learners of war and flight

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Abstract

There has been a significant increase in the number of undocumented people entering South Africa. A number of them include refugees. Many refugees are destitute and often denied basic needs such as health and education. Besides intentional exclusion by citizens and authorities, some immigrant children are precluded from education because they cannot gain access to schooling. This article captures the possibilities and constraints that are experienced by a selected group of refugee learners, in a school in which these children find themselves.The methodology derives from powerful narratives which are used as tools to analyse exclusionary and inclusionary practices, the relationship between which is presented as bi-directional. It is argued that the notion of exclusion and inclusion is multilayered. Different constructs of inclusion are developed around the thought, practices and experiences of refugee learners within the hosting school community. It is argued that what is offered by the school is a strikingly conservative discourse of perceived inclusion in the ways in which refugee learner practices get constructed. A theory of enforced humanitarianism emerges on the part of the school. It is only when we change this perspective on vulnerability that we are able to accept a more creative and effective way of including refugee learners who constantly believe that they are present in one place, but belong somewhere else.

Introduction

In post-apartheid South Africa there has been an increased flow of "people, goods and ideas" into the country, "albeit not always easily, cheaply or legally"(Klotz, 2000, 831). As emphasised by Weiner and Munz (1997, 25) geographic and social mobility are crucial elements characterising open societies. Over the past few years, there has also been a significant increase in the number of undocumented immigrants entering the country. After decades of isolation South Africa has become a sought after tourist and immigration destination, during a period when social, political and economic uncertainty and insecurity had become pronounced in Southern Africa. As the new South Africa seeks integration and greater participation in the global economy and in world politics (Maharaj, 2002, 47), there is a contradictory trend towards exclusivity in respect of its immigration policy (Reitzes, 1995; Croucher, 1998; Crush, 1999; Akokpari, 2000; Klotz, 2000). Furthermore no attempt is made to differentiate between illegal immigrants and refugees. The major concern is that the refugees are often destitute and denied access to basic needs such as health and education.

The Draft Refugee White Paper (Republic of South Africa, 1999. White Paper on International Migration, (www.gov.za/whitepaper/1999/migrate.htm), submitted by the refugee affairs task team is fairly silent about the education of refugee learners and does not respond to the responsibility of the state in managing learners at local South African schools. The only mention is made in Section 6.2 Public Education and Awareness of the White Paper. The document suggests that in order to counter the perceptions of refugees, efforts should be made to include human rights education in order that a culture of peace, tolerance and understanding may be fostered among the youth.

There has been relatively little research addressing the important issue of how refugee children get educated in their new country and this is the focus of the article. The research question draws from this focus: *What are the inclusionary and exclusionary practices by schools on refugee children?*

Research conducted in the field of refugees in general and South Africa specifically, focuses on the following issues:

- Misconceptions and false assumptions in respect of illegal immigrants in South Africa (Reitzes, 1997);

- migration as clandestine or undocumented (Plender, 1986);
- "irregular" migration (Cohen, 1991);
- stigmatisation of immigrants as criminals, as people who undermine economic development and take jobs from locals (Minnaar, Pretorious & Wentzel, 1995);
- xenophobic attitude towards immigrants, particularly those from other African countries (Reitzes, 1994; Minnaar, Pretorius & Wentzel, 1995);
- economic immigrants (Maharaj & Moodley, 2000).

In the review of literature with regard to refugee children and education in South Africa, very little research has been conducted on the impact of "cross-frontier" schooling or education on immigrants in South Africa. Research conducted in Winterveld by Reitzes (1997) reveals that since the 1994 elections, both immigrants and locals have perceived a new level of discrimination against foreigners in schools. In order to avoid detection and possible eviction, arrest and deportation, some immigrant parents admitted that their children presented themselves as South Africans with assumed surnames. One immigrant observed that as a result of fear of discrimination against immigrant children in schools, a large number of immigrant children are out on the streets" (Reitzes, 1997, 9). Besides intentional exclusion by citizens and the authorities, some immigrant children are precluded from access to schooling because they are not competent in the language of instruction.

The first part of this article briefly reviews refugee trends within a context of increased integration and greater participation of world politics in South Africa. The notion of inclusion and exclusion is looked at to suggest that these are not bipolar concepts but multilayered ones. The methodological approach is presented which derives from narrative analysis of stories told by the refugee learners themselves. The narrative practices of learners are captured within marginalisation discourses in which terminology, curriculum, vulnerability and space feature as significant indicators. The article concludes by offering insights that emerge from the rich and textured data gathered from the narratives of the learners.

'Refugeeness' defined

Becoming a refugee or a displaced person means that one, by some degree of force, has to move from one's place of residence to another place (Brun, 2001, 15). There is a continuing debate about whether to include people in refugee-like situations and former refugees (Van Hear, 1998 cited in Brun, 2001). It is, however, possible to differentiate between three categories of undocumented migrants. The first category refers to those who enter the country without valid documents. The second refers to migrants who enter the country legally, but stay on after the expiry of their visas. The third category refers to refugees and asylum seekers who generally have documents or their documents are being processed, and they have a legal right to be in South Africa (Lorgat, 1998). The focus of this article is on the last category.

The term 'refugee' is used in a broader context than the legal definition of the 1951 Geneva Convention which was formulated in response to those displaced in Europe as a result of the Second World War. Since the 1970s refugees from Africa, Asia and Latin America began to move in large numbers to western countries, adding a "north south dimension" (Cohen, 1991, 158). While commonly associated with those fleeing political persecution in terms of the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, in recent years there has been increasing realisation that those escaping from poverty and destitution could be called 'economic refugees'. Consequently in recent years the distinction between undocumented migrants and refugees has become blurred (Harris, 1995; Sassen, 1996).

Most refugees come to South Africa to escape the poverty and destitution in their own countries, as well as civil wars and political instability. A key concern is the poverty, violence and underdevelopment that engulf many African countries. According to the World Bank, the countries

surrounding South Africa, with the exception of Namibia and Botswana, are among the poorest in the world (World Bank, 1999). As with the rest of Africa, "the artificiality of some of the international borders, the political instability of several regions and the paucity of administrative resources when compared with the lengths of the borders and the numbers of migrants involved", have contributed to an escalation in the number of illegals entering South Africa (Plender, 1986, 546).

In South Africa illegal immigrants have been accused of taking away jobs from locals, lowering wages, increasing crime, spreading disease and increasing the pressure on health, welfare and other social services; safety and security; correctional services and justice. An immediate problem was that migrants were seen to threaten the jobs of locals and also undermine wages in an economy that had a high unemployment rate. However migrants contributed to the economy by buying goods and services, and importing skills. A significant body of research has suggested that migrants actually created job opportunities, especially in the small, medium and micro-enterprise sectors (Rogerson, 1997; Peberdy & Crush, 1998; Peberdy & Rogerson, 2000). Notwithstanding this fact, they continue to be excluded (Reitzes, 1994; Minnaar, Pretorius & Wentzel, 1995).

In the next section definitions of inclusion and exclusion are examined especially while commonplace definitions of inclusion and exclusion suggest that these terms are counter-posed, issues of who is being included, who is being excluded, who is doing the including and excluding, into what and from what are people being included and excluded, and who declares or decides that people are branded 'excluded' would appear to suggest that these concepts are multilayered, referring as much to processes of inclusion and exclusion as to the acts themselves. Sayed, (2002) further contends that the process of social inclusion may mean that the included still experience a sense of exclusion.

Unpacking inclusion and exclusion

Kabeer (2000, 87) suggests that there are various ways in which segmentation of society could occur as a result of exclusion and inclusion, e.g. "we can think in terms of privileged inclusion, secondary inclusion, adverse incorporation or problematic inclusion, self-exclusion and 'hard-core' exclusion". Slee (2001, 114) argues that inclusive education is nothing more than "a default vocabulary for assimilation". It is clear that the concept masks more serious issues of educational agendas. It can be argued in this article that inclusion and exclusion are not bipolar concepts, and that the relationship between these terms are seen as bi-directional which perpetuate or underlie disadvantage.

Methodological context of the study

Part of the methodological position is derived from Gough's (1999, 40) work, who is interested in what can be learnt by generating own stories of educational experience, by thinking about educational problems and issues as stories and texts, and by subjecting all the stories and texts encountered in work to various forms of narrative and textual analysis, critique and deconstruction. As Stoicheff (1991, 95) puts it, "the world is a text that is read, and our interpretation of our world is a function of our reading of texts".

In this stud, the stories told by refugee children are provocative because they are fashioned by somebody, somewhere, and this has particular significance for educators and other local learners because such stories may be told and received differently when they are dislocated from the places in which their meanings were initially shaped as in the case of refugee children. Essentially these stories have the idiocyncratic "cultural fingerprints" of times and places in which they were constructed (Harding, 1994, 304). This is especially true for the refugee children in this study.

As Connelly and Clandinin (1990, 2) write:

... humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives.
The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways in which humans experience

the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories: teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories.

The lives of refugee learners were richly textured and the reconstruction of personal stories both compelling and powerful. Informal interviews with the 22 refugee learners made intriguing listening especially when they occurred collaboratively. These selected narratives have not been documented and were 'virgin' stories devoid of editing but simultaneously enriched with a deep cultural flavour. The initial register used to articulate the narratives was diversified to include Swahili and French. This system of codeswitching served to enhance the affluence of the narratives.

Informal interviews were also conducted with five educators involved in the teaching of these learners and the principal of the school. It is clear that they are seen as those who decide on principles of inclusion or exclusion and those that are doing the including and excluding.

This study was conducted at Clareville Primary which is located in the district of Clare Estate, an area previously demarcated for Indians only in terms of the Group Areas Act. It was built 50 years ago by the Indian community spearheaded by a community and religious leader, Mr RP Moodley. This approach to state-aided schooling was done in several districts in KwaZulu Natal. In 1984-1985 Clareville Primary had already started to take in children of other racial groups well before the opening of schools to all races. This was as a result of the growing numbers of informal dwellers who had located themselves two kilometers down the road.

The introduction of refugee learners at Clareville primary school occurred in January 1997. These children were not accepted at schools in the area where they resided, *viz*. Point in central Durban, hence forcing parents to examine alternative schools for their children. Admission of refugee learners became a new phenomenon at schools and many principals refused admission to these children. However Clareville Primary was the only school to accept refugee children. This inclusive admission policy challenged the then perceived policy of refusal. Once the word went around that Clareville had relaxed the admission policy for refugee learners, and no substantive official opposition was imposed against this school, other schools began to open their doors as well. Although currently it is not economically viable (R50 a month for travel alone) for these children to travel to Clareville, the increasing numbers each year could be seen as a result of the supposed flexibility of the school in accepting these learners.

Admitting learners of flight and war

The children in this study come from southern African countries which would include Mozambique, Zaire, Tanzania, Algeria, Burundi, Rwanda, Ghana and Senegal. Their point of entry has been the boarder crossings into South Africa; a few have written about being stowaways in ships. For many of the parents of these children the reasons for the choice of Durban as a final destination fall largely into two categories: social and economic (Maharaj, 2000). This includes job opportunities and better pay and a few who have relatives, friends and spouses in South Africa, specifically in Durban. The key reasons for their departure have been poverty, violence and underdevelopment that engulf many African countries which constitute their place of birth (Reitzes, 1997). According to the World Bank (1999) the countries surrounding South Africa, with the exception of Namibia and Botswana, are among the poorest in the world.

Refugee children are generally officially registered with the Refugee Forum in Durban, which provides financial support and this enables the parents to keep their children in school. Parents have constant telephonic communication with educators and the principal regarding learner progress. These parents show keenness in becoming involved in the education of their children.

A large number of the children have permits from Home Affairs which normally allow access to the country. However, it is clear that the principal has not insisted on their permits when parents have not been able to provide these. There is little probing or pressure exercised on the parents to

present status documents to the school. The principal is in part supported by the South African Schools Act 1997 which does allow for the admission of refugee children with proper documentation. This by implication could mean an acceptance of foreign learners who could either be displaced, illegal immigrants or learners with refugee status.

The only concern expressed by educators in respect of the admission of such learners was the issue of instability in terms of school provisioning norms. Given the mobility of refugee learners, educators believed that this would upset the provisioning norms set by the school and this has staffing implications for the whole school. The intake of refugee learners has grown steadily from 1998 with 17 learners to 74 in 2002. The principal of the school attributes this growing intake to the care and nurturing accorded to refugee children. Apart from the extremely low school fund (R210), uniforms and tracksuits are given to these children when they arrive at the school for the first time. School funds in the area where these children live range between R700-R800.

Discourses of exclusion practices

There are several ways in which exclusion practices get operationalised and the first and most observable way how learners felt excluded after being supposedly included into the schooling system, has been the use of particular terminology. It is also argued that although some "inclusionary" help was offered, the curriculum presented to the refugee learner did not include these learners in a substantive way. Yet another way in which exclusionary practices occur is in the form of physical alienation.

• Terminology

The term *refugee* was considered embarrassing by some children as it indicated a sense of abandonment of the home country because of food shortage. The term *foreign learners* was preferred. In the interview this was noted very clearly in the following statement:

> Like the principal comes to our class and says "all refugee children come to the office", we feel embarrassed …we feel sad.

The children believe that the term *refugee* is negative as it denotes a sense of disloyalty to one's own country. It also subscribes to the notion of poverty brought on by war and politics and the idea that they needed "protection" was considered disempowering. This is not necessarily true for some of the children whose parents are professionals and who have consciously chosen to come to South Africa given the better job and educational opportunities offered. As indicated by one learner:

> …we never ran from our own country ... our father just took us to a better country to be educated …our father tell us he never ran away from our country, he just took us ...

The term *kwerekwere* was started by a few children largely because of *"my skin colour and the way we talked".* It is for this reason that many of the refugee children felt extremely unwelcome and continue to feel unwelcome especially when they continue to refer to them as *kwerekwere*. This term also indicated that these children did not fit into the popular culture of games at the local store:

> At the shop the locals trouble us and tell us where we come from there are no such games and we don't know how to play ... most of the children tease us saying 'there goes the *kwerekwere'*.

It will also appear that much of the teasing and harassing happens away from the school, e.g. in the bus, on the road, at the shop.

The use of one derogatory term *kwerekwere* (abusive reference to refugee) was often cited as a word that invoked some form of marginalisation. Moving beyond economic and material

explanations, which are largely associated with the influx of refugees in general, Bouillon (1998, 23-24) has suggested that "immigrants tend to interpret a culturally driven hostility among black South Africans … driven by the sight of the foreign and the culturally unknown". This appears true for learners who get supposedly included in schools.

•   Curriculum issues

Initially a support programme was offered for English competence in the form of the Breakthrough programme. This was not continued when it was found that the refugee learners were adept at learning languages in general and applied themselves seriously to the acquisition of English and isiZulu. Within the first three months most refugee learners were fluent in reading, speaking and writing English for academic purposes. For many of the children, French and Swahili had been the language of teaching and learning.

A definite problem existed in learning other languages, especially Afrikaans. Zulu has similarities with Swahili and the children are able to learn this language more readily because of the familiar words and phrases. Afrikaans pronunciation is difficult and they would choose to speak French rather than Afrikaans. It was also suggested that more mature students teach them French in the absence of a French teacher!

Teachers speak much too fast in English and in some cases teachers do repeat lessons but in others teachers are not as co-operative about repeating lessons. The greatest difficulty is in written tests and all refugee learners feel this difficulty collectively. Although the principal indicated that very little difficulty was experienced by the refugee children, it became obvious after speaking to them that not knowing English caused a great degree of marginalisation:

> We did not know English so we had to speak in our home language which was either Swahili or French … this was a problem because the Zulu children thought that we were swearing them.

In terms of the curriculum many of the children wanted a more inclusive curriculum that would tell them more about their country's history and politics. It is clear that they feel completely excluded, especially when some of them don't have the immediate parental support. Neither is there any update of happenings in their respective countries.

It is interesting to note that many of these children did not know about South Africa, yet knew about Namibia, Zimbabwe and other countries. Their idea of South Africa is largely shaped by Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg and Cape Town. Other African countries far north are also not familiar to these children.

Some teachers alienate the children by suggesting that nothing has been learned by them in their old schools:

> How do we feel? We feel bad. Do you think we have no respect?

There are several compelling stories told by refugee children and by sharing their stories. All learners were exposed to critical lessons on the social mobility of people, and by creating a sense of geopolitics in the minds of the learners and the educator.

•   Physical alienation

Principals at other schools physically separated the foreign learners from the others:

> The principal asked us to go (to) one place at the hall … we musn't stay where the Zulus were. When we asked why he just said that we must do what he says. He would not say this to the Zulu children because they belong to this country and we don't …

This was motivated as an organisational approach to facilitate identification, the curriculum and other forms of support.

There is some indication of physical violence on the part of the local children not necessarily

in school but out in the district. Part of this violence derives from zenophobic behaviour especially when uniforms were handed out freely to these children on their arrivals. It is clear that their parents have been perceived as foreigners who "steal jobs from the locals".

In South Africa there has been a xenophobic tendency to stigmatise immigrants, particularly those from other African countries as criminals, or as people who undermine economic development and take jobs from locals. There are many fallacies and false presumptions about illegal immigrants in South Africa because this form of migration is often "clandestine or undocumented" (Plender, 1986, 546), and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) has referred to it as 'irregular' migration (Cohen, 1991). It is evident that as much as the learners feel "included" in the new environment, there is a constant will to return to their homeland.

Poignant discourse of return

Many of the learners interviewed believed that the education in their countries of birth does not receive any recognition ("My father was learning to become a doctor but he did not find a job in the country…"). It is possible that at times a person may be displaced yet have improved aspects of their life during displacement. In terms of education there is a perception among the learners that the quality and status of education in South Africa is far superior than to what they had received before ("... our father just took us to a better country to be educated …").

In spite of the dissatisfaction expressed there is always a sense that they will return:

When I grow up and have all the things I want … I will take it back to the country. I know my country is going to be good like South Africa.

According to Cornish *et al*. (1999, 282) the "initial positive attitude toward the homeland may be seen as a resource to be built upon in facilitating reintegration, but it may also be that without sufficient support for the transition, the return to the homeland will not be a success, either in terms of economic viability or psychological well-being and social integration".

Discourse of vulnerability or empowerment: victims or survivors?

In the following section it is argued that the discourse of vulnerability can contribute to the way in which these learners get included or excluded in school. By either seeing them as survivors or victims, both the educators and principal of the school reacted in a particular way.

The movement of the original refugee children was a consequence of the violence in their respective countries of birth, when they travelled with their parents and other relatives, as well as strangers to other countries. In the case of Lambert "…my parents were killed in the war but fortunately I managed to escape and I met other people running away and I joined them and we ran together to Tanzania". Minnaar and Wentzel (1995, 1) believe that the most important reason for refugees leaving their home country vary from civil war, political violence to drought and economic stagnation. From the interviews about their lives, it became evident that almost 80% of the refugee learners have been exposed to the violence of civil war. This is an excerpt from Jean's story:

One night rebels came to our camp and burnt it and they took many boys over 14 years of age to be used in the fight. My brother was killed on that night. A friend of his whom he attended university with, met me where I was sitting and crying and lied to me that he knew where my aunt was and he would take me there. We walked 7 days and we travelled from Tanganyika to Tanzania. Tanzania wanted to return refugees back to their countries. I had just forgotten about my brother and they decided to leave Tanzania. They left Tanzania with me and we went to Malawi. We travelled by ship and police caught us twice in that ship. We told them our problems and also gave them some money and they let us go because we did not have passports. And again in Malawi we travelled by bus without passports. We used to give drivers some money to talk to the police for us

because we did not know their language. We were lucky that we didn't meet the police. We reached Mozambique and we saw where the office of the Red Cross was, entered, and explained to them that we were refugees and where we had come from. It was 17h00.

Although some of them may appear to have emerged seemingly unscathed, it is quite possible that they continued to be predisposed to becoming emotionally traumatised. Clearly, the ravages of war being waged in the different African countries created many challenges that created opportunities for developing life skills. These experiences allowed opportunities for the one educator to redesign life orientation programmes at the school.

To survive migration under traumatic circumstances, especially separation from family members requires exceptional fortitude, a creative mind and profound determination for survival. These positive attributes by refugee learners signalled the potential to develop into successful learners. Both the principal as well as the educators interviewed affirmed that refugee children worked hard to succeed and were generally goal-oriented and as a result overcame many odds to excel. According to one educator, at present the excelling learners at their school are foreign learners:

> Constant dialoguing with these learners revealed a profound sense of discipline and a voracious appetite for knowledge and educational success. There was also evidence of a degree of alienation and peer jealousy (by locals) that frequently emerged in the learners' discourses. Their resolve for academic growth resulted in refugee learners often admonishing peers (local) for disruptive behaviour.
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> There is little visible correspondence – on one hand educators are impressed with their coping capacities and their pragmatic approach to resolving difficulties, on the other invoking sympathy. It is clear that the groups are not homogenous – some tough and tireless, others powerless and weak physically. There is a need to realise that refugee-like situations are "part of a complex network of migrants who have migrated with different degrees of force and intention" (Brun, 2001, 16) – their survival more on the strength of these learners than their past. Instead of victimising these learners as a particularly vulnerable, homogenous category, educators fail to offer an emanicipatory support which would dignify them by acknowledging and supporting their own strengths of survival. It is clear that by using the uni-dimensional lens educators tend to create dilemmas and expectations as well as false dichotomies of the situation. In the next section it is argued that the educators' sense of space can contribute to how learners could get included.

A spatial discourse

Both educators as well as learner stories construct a sense of place and space which is intriguing and new to the other learners whose sense of space has been largely limited to KwaZulu-Natal:

> From Rwanda we ran away to Congo in 1996. Our lives were very hard and during the war in Congo, I witnessed the killing of babies and old people, I also witnessed the killing of my grandmother and felt helpless. All I could do was cry. We were very hungry and used to eat mangoes and drink the water from the river. We walked day and night because we did want to die in Zambia. We then went to Malawi were we stayed in the refugee camp for eight months. We lived on rice, peanuts and sugar. After eight months the Republic of Malawi chased the refugees one night so we walked from the camp to the town … it was a long distance away. We became separated from our father in Malawi … together with my mother, brother and sister, we found ourselves in Mozambique … later found my father in the refugee camp in Mozambique. From Mozambique, we walked hundreds of kilometers until we reached South Africa. The terrain was dangerous because of the wild animals and the presence of soldiers.

Brun (2001) argues that the way in which space and place are conceptualised suggests that all people have a natural place in the world, and therefore refugees have been regarded as being torn loose from their place and thus from their cultural identity. She contests this "essentialist" view by presenting an alternative understanding of space and place, separating identity from place to show that though refugees have to move from their places of origin, they do not lose their identity and ability to exercise power (Brun, 2001, 15). Thus the educator's "essentialist" view allows the notion of displacement to be seen as soul-destroying ("to be forcefully moved from your land of birth"), hence the humanitarian reason for inclusion.

An inclusive curriculum: Using learner stories to understand *refugeeness*

Although the use of learner narratives particularly of marginalised learners signalled a positive sign that educators and learners alike "were evolving and improving the foundation for human development and promoting camaraderie leading to the development of special partnerships between local and refugee learners alike", issues of refugeeness have yet to seriously become part of the structured curriculum of the school.

Selected educators found themselves constantly reviewing what to teach and how to teach in a way that would create maximum opportunities for refugee experiences to be shared by all learners. For these educators, their entire pedagogy became centred on the following themes:

- An identification of the refugee learners (age, sex, parents, employment status);
- a review of their personal histories (origin and destination: migration characteristics and patterns);
- an exploration of their demography (geopolitical and transnational dynamics);
- refugee learner perception to education in South Africa (learning, perceptions, teachers);
- refugee learner perception to language (multilingualism, second/third language learning);
- refugee learner attitude to race, culture and religion;
- refugee learner to accommodation and adaptation;
- refugee learner adaptation (psychological, attitudinal).

Using the above ideas, they were able to successfully develop lessons which included learner stories in reviewing the lives of all their learners. Geopolitical and transnational dynamics meant the use of maps to illustrate movement of these learners. Drawings, letters to educators, advertisements from magazines to illustrate career plans and family profile; lessons allowing for a multiplicity of voices in the different languages especially French and Swahili; writing of poetry by the children and the use of such presentations for comprehension lessons. A larger part of the lessons were framed around oral sessions in which dance, drama, song and storytelling from the country of their birth were integral components.

For many educators the stories narrated by these learners meant that, through their stories, all learners were able to vividly travel transnationally and the refugee learners had unwittingly initiated a new, reconceptualised curriculum, not just for English but for other disciplines such as Geography and Economics.

Gough (1999) focuses on the idea that much of what we claim to know in education comes from telling each other stories of educational experience. By using the narratives of the refugee learners, educators were able to construct and convey different meanings to their daily lives. In many ways the narrative inquiry approach within a reviewed curriculum was intended to be emancipatory rather than assimilationist or accommodationist or paternalistic. Many educators believed that the way they began to give meaning to themselves and others and the world at large

sometimes happens through stories of which they are largely unaware or which are taken for granted and

> ... giving refugee learners extended opportunities meant reflecting critically on stories we read, hear, live and tell, that helped us understand how we can use them more responsibly and creatively and free us from their constraints.

It is evident that these children are able to adopt the elements of the host culture that are useful for survival and acceptance in a new environment, while clinging to aspects of their original heritage that provide emotional security. They learn the host language, cultural values and practices more quickly than adults. It is quite clear that the adaptiveness and resilience in spite of poor physical health, disruption to and loss of family, separation, statelessness, lack of security, environmental degradation, social marginalisation, lack of education and absence of power, choice and control over their lives, has allowed for inclusion and exclusion practices to be interpreted in different ways by the principal and the educators in the school under study.

Concluding insights

In refugee studies there is an increasing need of culturally specific knowledge informed by the experiences of people themselves – people who are involved in the everyday struggle of war and flight in which nothing is fixed and permanent any longer. There is a clear need for the development of more contextualised conceptualisations that can represent the fast-changing realities of the different social actors themselves. When looked at from the perspective of people undergoing violence and flight, all well-established, and generally universalising concepts and categories can be questioned (Schrivers, 1999).

Clearly there are different constructs of exclusion and inclusion that can be classified into different groups. Refugee children are conceptualised through their relations with other children in the school and in practice demarcate ways of thought and practice. To this effect they feel excluded by the kind of discourses used by their peers at school. The "traditional" discourse is still very influential – it is the only discourse that prevails: that of inclusion in a way that alienates in a context where the persons that symbolically exclude do so without the specific intention of excluding.

The attempts of educators to include either partially or exclude symbolically, are evident in the way the existing curriculum of the school continues to be offered to these learners. The elements of inclusion and exclusion can also be observed in the way these learners are perceived. Refugee learners are seen by the educators as children with a miraculous synergy of violent battle and escapade imagery: the learner who holds an automatic rifle in one hand and a school bag in the other. Educators are paternalistic in their inclusion of these learners and consider them to have a strange mix of heroism through brutality and suffering, and the enthusiasm of virgin learners. These learners are seen as heroic, hence the exotic paternalising that drives a sense of inclusion.

What is offered by the school is a strikingly conservative discourse of normalcy of inclusion, which abounds in notions of inclusion, but manifests itself as exclusionary practice, hence the bi-directionality in the relationship between *inclusion* and *exclusion*: a sense of supposed inclusion by the refugee learners but feeling ultimately excluded with the one becoming dependent on the other.

The question that arises is "how do refugee learners get represented?" and "how does this correspond or contrast with their actual experiences?" In the interviews, partially contradictory images of learners in the dominant representations of refugees at this school were encountered. Firstly, the image of the refugee learner as having had brutal experiences is evident from the selected narratives presented by these learners. This led to a vision of the learner as particularly vulnerable (need for English support, perceived psychological support or post trauma counselling, sympathy seeking, head-bowed displaced learners with a traumatised past and a bleak future).

The dominant image of the learner on the part of educators and the principal as poverty-stricken, dependent and vulnerable yet they could be pitied and admired at the same time. Enduring the memories of the violent, brutal past, the loss of relatives, friends and status, and close family members – creating an absolutely bleak, insecure life-world in which socio-economic discrimination and difficulties of daily survival were the "normal" state of affairs. It is argued that this is one way in which these children feel excluded and disempowered. In their reflective narratives, war and flight are considered a liberating experience. They have been able to experience relative freedom and strengthen and empower themselves. The supposed vulnerability of these children was an image, a social construct from within the school without any proof that this really corresponded with the actual needs of these learners.

Refugee learners need to be located and included in the context of fast-changing, flight curriculum discourses which go beyond devising humanitarian and aid programmes. There is a need to approach refugee learners according to multidimensional life-worlds, in which gender, ethnicity, age, class and caste are acknowledged as a complex whole determining their outlook on life. The "inclusive" support offered by the school is uni-dimensional and homogenous and is not a useful practice given the varying status of the learners. There is a need to ensure a recognition of each learner's strength and creative coping ability. The learners are either not vulnerable nor strong. One learner can combine both qualities, depending on the situation and personal history and the specific context in which the learner is approached. The learner seem exceptionally resilient and even emancipated, allowing the educators to view them as normal children – *we see children, not refugees.* In spite of this notion, vulnerability has featured highly in humanitarian discourse and has particular implications for displaced children who themselves seek out the sympathy of their educators ("We suffer and cry but nobody can hear us …so please understand what refugees are all about and that they are human …"). A theory of enforced humanitarianism emerges on the part of the educators.

Yet "humanitarianism", resilience and determination are characteristics of these children who have undergone multiple crises of physical and psychological injury and rejection by communities. This also predisposes assistance programmes towards offering palliative care rather than confronting underlying systemic injustices – the danger of this being regarded as a dependency syndrome, addicted to assistance. It is only when we change this narrow perspective on vulnerability that we are able to see both variety and creativity among the refugee learners.

In trying to "include", refugee learners become acutely aware of the limitations imposed upon them – the lack of familiar space can have emotional and psychological repercussions, with children losing self-esteem and having their horizons restricted with regard to what they hope to achieve in school. The frustrations they feel about people making assumptions about their backgrounds and the alienation of being labelled a refugee rather than being accepted as an individual are also troubling.

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