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An exploration into educators' perceptions and attitudes towards immigrant learners

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CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter explores literature around the various concepts central to the study:

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2.1 Xenophobia

2.2 Attitudes and Perceptions (the creation of the 'other')

2.3 Inclusion

2.4 Immigration

2.5 Language

2.1 Xenophobia

The literature reviewed showed a limited number of studies had been done on xenophobia. Within the Southern African Developing Countries region (SADC), an organisation called the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP), conducted research on xenophobia. The SAMP studies focused mainly on stereotypes regarding migration in six of SADC countries, namely: South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Swaziland.

In addition to SAMP's research, the Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign, an initiative of the National Consortium on Refugee Affairs, the South African Human Rights Commission and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, was launched in December

1998. The campaign was initiated in response to the increase of xenophobia and the violence against foreigners, particularly African immigrants, in South Africa. (SAHRC).

The Roll Back Xenophobia Campaign defines xenophobia as "a deep dislike of non-nationals by nationals based on fear of the unknown or anything that is seen as different" (2001: 1).

In a further study, *Legal and Illegal Migrants: The Nigerian Experience in Johannesburg*, Adelaja, explains xenophobia as a form of racism based on the overt racist actions it evokes. "There is a discrepancy between racist actions and xenophobia, and theorising the latter is definitely problematic since it is the basis for both overt racist actions and more subtle forms of exclusion hidden in the discourse of society. These subtle forms of exclusion include feelings of fear and hostility towards foreigners" (2001: 90).

The term xenophobia stems from two Greek words, 'xenos' and 'phobia'. 'Xenos' means stranger or foreigner and 'phobia' means fear. This implies that xenophobia is a fear of strangers. It is also defined as a hatred for strangers and/or foreigners (Barnhart & Barnhart (1990) World Book Dictionary; McLeod (1984) The New Collins Compact English Dictionary, 1984).

According to Sudan, (2002) "Xenophobia is firmly fixed within the symbolic register of representation and its referents are produced through the paranoiac construction of the

‘other’ ”. This means that for xenophobia to be evident there must be two groups, an ‘in-group’, in this case being the locals or educators and an ‘out-group’, being foreigners or the immigrant learners. The in-group sees the out-group as the ‘other’ (Weiten, 2001).

“Xenophobia is the process by which the ‘other’ is constructed, but its definition is contingent on previous interest or attraction to the foreign (xenodochy)” (Sudan, 2002: 7). Sudan states that long perceived and accepted as a ‘phobia’, the fear of the foreign may, in fact, signify something quite different. …The fear of something foreign presupposes that ‘we’ can understand what counts as foreign, but how are we to come to an understanding of the foreign without recognizing it within some signifying system that makes sense to us?

Xenophobia in South African schools is found possibly due to myths and stereotypes on (im)migration. Some of the myths and stereotypes are discussed in a study by McDonald, Gay, Zinyama, Mattes & de Vletter (1998) conducted in Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Mozambique. They looked at myths existing around immigrants and gave results in their survey of the true state of affairs:

Myth:

1. Every poor and desperate person on the African continent wants to get into South Africa.

Result of survey: *actually showed that people preferred their own countries.*

Myth:

2. People are jumping the borders in millions using whatever means necessary to get into South Africa.

Results of the study*: showed that more than 90% used formal immigration posts – formal transport, buses, trains, taxis, etc. 89% had formal travel documents and 72% proper visas.*

Myth:

3. People from the region flood to South Africa to find work or to use health and other social services.

Results of the study*: revealed that people come to visit, on holiday, to buy or sell.*

Myth:

4. Government and people in the region expect South Africa to throw open their doors to whoever wants to enter.

Results of the study*: indicated that they wanted the government to relax their regulations but they did not say that there should be no borders.*

Myth:

5. Conditions in the region are only going to get worse and unless South Africa takes a tougher stand on immigration policy, the country will continue to be inundated with illegal aliens.

Results of the study*: revealed that this was an assumption and that it could not be proven* (SAMP 1998).

In conclusion xenophobia is seen as a concept where immigrant learners in South African schools are '*the other*', making them the '*out-group*' and the educators the '*in-group*'. The creation of '*the other*' happens when the '*in-group*' develops negative attitudes towards and perceive members of the '*out-group*' in a negative way.

2.2 Creation of the other…Attitudes and Perceptions

Attitudes are defined by Weiten (2001: 671) as "positive or negative evaluations of objects of thought. 'Objects of thought' may include social issues, groups, institutions, consumer products and people". The components that make up attitudes are described in the following ways: the cognitive component is made up of the beliefs that people hold about the object of an attitude. The affective component is made up of emotional feelings stimulated by the object of thought. The behavioural component consists of predisposition to act in a certain way towards the object of attitude.

- Attitudes may be made up of cognitive, effective, and behavioural components. Attitudes and behaviour aren't as consistent as one might assume, in part because attitude strength varies, and in part because attitudes only create predispositions to behave in certain ways.

- A source of persuasion that (that sounds better than who) is credible, expert, trustworthy, likable, and physically attractive tends to be relatively effective in stimulating attitude change.

- Attitudes may be shaped through classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and observational learning. Festinger's dissonance theory asserts that inconsistent attitudes cause tension and that people alter their attitudes to reduce cognitive dissonance.

- Dissonance theory has been used to explain attitude change following counter attitudinal behaviour and efforts that haven't panned out. Some of these phenomena can be explained by self-perception theory, which posits that people may infer their attitudes from behaviour.

(Weiten, 2001:678)

In the book, *Psychology: Themes and Variations,* Weiten (2001: 656), states that person perception is the process of forming impressions of others. Evolutionary theorists attribute the behaviour of automatically categorising others to our distant ancestors' need to quickly separate friend from foe. These theorists assert that humans are programmed by evolution to immediately classify people as members of an *in-group* – a group that one belongs to and identifies with, or as members of an *out-group* – a group that one does not belong to or identify with.

- People's perceptions of others can be distorted by a variety of factors, including physical appearance. People tend to attribute desirable characteristics, such as intelligence, competence, warmth, and friendliness, to those who are good looking.

- People use social schemas to categorise others into types. Stereotypes are widely held social schemas that lead people to expect that others will have certain characteristics because of their membership in a specific group.

- Gender, age, ethnic, and occupational stereotypes are common. In interacting with others, stereotypes may lead people to see what they expect to see and to overestimate how often they see it.

- Evolutionary psychologists argue that many biases in person perception were adaptive in human' ancestral past. The human tendency to automatically categorise others may reflect the primitive need to quickly separate friend from foe.

(Weiten, 2001:659)

2.3 Inclusion

Khumalo (2000: 31), in her thesis, *Teaching volume to Grade 7 learners in an inclusive classroom,* states that: "South Africa's moving to democracy and the respect for human

rights in the last few years has led to many changes. Such changes have affected and influenced both general and special education".

The human rights movement and the need to include all persons into society have also influenced the education system in many ways. In the new education system different education departments were merged to form one Department of Education. The national Department of Education embraced the paradigm of inclusive education and was documented in Education White Paper No 6: Special Needs Education, Building an inclusive education and training system (2001).

2.3.1 Inclusion as Concept and Philosophy

Naidoo (1996) in the Inclusion policy document (2), states that inclusion in its pure form should be defined as a warm, embracing attitude, accepting and accommodating another human being unconditionally, thus expressing the human element within every individual. Inclusion implies acceptance of difference. The underlying philosophy of inclusion claims that all people, including those with special needs, form part of society. It is based on a socio-critical perspective representing a paradigm shift, not only for education, but also for life as a whole (Gauteng Department of Education: 1996).

Meyers (1994) cited in Naidoo (1996) states that "inclusion can be viewed as a basic value that extends to all children: Everyone belongs. Inclusion allows for a variety of

opportunities for every individual to grow. All children do benefit from a heterogeneous learning environment".

The South African Constitution of 1996 has a dedicated chapter on the Bill of Human Rights. Section 9 of The Constitution is entitled Equality and it dictates that "the state may not unfairly discriminate directly and indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth." It continues to state that no person may be unfairly discriminated directly or indirectly on any ground in terms of the above.

Education White Paper 6, (2001: 17) has the following to say about inclusion:

- Inclusion is about recognizing and respecting the differences among all learners and building on the similarities between them.

- Inclusion is about supporting all learners, educators, and the system as a whole so that the full range of learning needs can be met. The focus is on teaching and learning actors, with the emphasis on the development of good teaching strategies that will be of benefit to all learners.

- Inclusion focuses on overcoming barriers in the system that prevent it from meeting the full range of learning needs. The focus is on adaptation of and support systems available in the classroom.

"In other words, inclusion is not simply about reconstructing provision for learners with disabilities, but is a means of extending educational opportunities to a wide range of marginalised groups who may historically have had little or no access to schooling" (Engelbrecht, P.; Green, L.; Naicker, S. & Engelbrecht, L. 1999: 32).

It is also stated in the White Paper 6 that not only learners need to be supported but the educators also need to be supported to facilitate the learning and teaching process. Thus, the literature suggests that from an inclusive perspective all learners should be supported in the learning environment irrespective of their learning needs/barriers to learning. Learning barriers could be anything that could impede on the process of learning from taking place.

2.3.2 Inclusion as Practice

With an inclusive environment to learning different learners will have different learning needs that need to be recognised and accommodated. Khumalo (2000: 31) and Engelbrecht, et al (1999: 19) define inclusion as "an education system that is responsive to the diverse needs of learners".

Munshi (1998: 3) states that "the history of education in South Africa and the unique configuration of social, cultural, political, demographic and ideological factors that exists in South Africa places it in a unique situation when it comes to integration".

Based on the above statements one can infer that the introduction of inclusive education would not be an easy process for practising educators to assimilate especially in a country whose past is embedded in exclusive approaches at various levels. Engelbrecht, et al (1999: 70), supports the view that "…teachers need the time and the psychological space to re-examine their general understanding of teaching and learning". They may need support in order to focus on the positive rather than the negative aspects of change.

The Revised-National Curriculum Statement (R-NCS) Grades R-9, in its principle of Social Justice, a Healthy Environment, Human Rights and Inclusivity states that:

> "The curriculum can play a vital role in creating awareness of the relationship between human rights, a healthy environment, social justice and inclusivity. …The R-NCS has tried to ensure that all Learning Area Statements reflect the principles and practices of social justice, respect for the environment and human rights as defined in the Constitution. In particular the curriculum attempts to be sensitive to issues of poverty, inequality, race, gender, age, disability, and such challenges as HIV/AIDS."

It is stated in the Policy Handbook for Educators edited by Brunton & Associates (2003: 6), that the R-NCS adopts an inclusive approach by specifying minimum requirements for all learners (H-46). Naidoo (1996), in the Policy Handbook for Educators (2003), states that inclusive education is guided not by sympathy but by an ethos of support. It is geared towards a learner-centred approach. This implies that teachers and other educators must be ready to work with all learners from whatever backgrounds they come from or whatever impairments/abilities they may have.

2.4 The Role of Language

An inclusive approach would befit the needs of immigrant learners who do not speak the language of the receiving country. Inadequate language skills should not be used to discriminate against them nor should it lead to exclusion. Within the realm of the inclusion language should be seen as a transient learning barrier. In South Africa, English is the medium of instruction used in the majority of schools. In a study adapted from CASA, cited in Orlek, (1997: 19) it is stated that: “Any one language, English, or Afrikaans, or Xhosa, may be used to oppress other people, or to liberate them. Xhosa, spoken by some, is the language of the oppressor. Spoken by others, Xhosa is the language of the oppressed fighting for their freedom”.

The above could apply in the South African school context where immigrant learners are excluded from teaching and learning activities on the grounds of a language that they do

not understand. This exclusion, by the educators or the learners, could be precipitated inside and outside the classroom.

Language can be used as *a power tool*, (Janks, 1995: 2 & 7) in the sense that if one cannot express him/-herself in the language spoken in that particular place in this case at school, then one does not have the power to stand their ground or claim their rights. It can also be seen as a *tool for creating a sense of belonging* (Janks, 1995: 5). This means that if immigrant learners cannot speak the spoken language and thus cannot be understood, they cannot belong to the 'in-group'. Language can therefore according to Adelaja's study (2001) be seen as "the subtle form of exclusion". Thus language, social identity and power are integrated and as such are a social issue.

Cropley (1983: 123) is of the opinion that: "An aspect of psychological development and of adjustment to the receiving society which is of such importance as to warrant separate discussion is the dual question of the role of the mother tongue in the adjustment of immigrant children, and that of how to teach them English".

Not mastering the language of the host country, which in most South African schools is English and other official languages spoken by South African learners, can cause problems for immigrant learners. This makes life difficult for them in school. They have difficulty understanding and following instructions; they also find it difficult to express themselves. Because of that they can incorrectly be labelled as lazy, rebellious and having negative attitude towards education. "Their chances of experiencing success are

reduced, with negative consequences for both motivation and belief in their own competence" (Cropley, 1983: 124). According to Cropley (1983), this raises the possibility of a psychological reaction involving rejection of school, rejection of English, feelings of hopelessness, a sense of despair or rage, and entanglement in a web of self-perpetuating difficulties.

It is stated in Hawkes (1966: 15) "…teachers and observers have said that language is the key to the problem of integration in the educational system. Special teaching is often needed, both so that ordinary teachers may not be hampered in their work, and so that the immigrant children can be prepared to benefit as fully as possible from their education".

Language is seen as a system of rules, symbols and sounds used for communicating and understanding, and for reflecting feelings, thoughts and experience. It is also said to have other dimensions such as the social and economical opportunity it provides in society (Musker, Bennett & Pule: 1997: 3).

The issue of language can thus be seen as an overriding factor mitigating against immigrant learners when they attempt to be included into mainstream schooling.

2.5 Issues around Immigration

Stereotypes around migration (SAMP, 1998), covers the locals' fear around the fact that because of the escalation number of immigrants, crime is on the increase. There is also a misconception about the fact that immigrants take jobs away from the locals. These stereotypes are supported by research carried out by other authors, who reflected on the emotive aspects of adult immigrants, (Nhlapo, 2001; Shindondola, 2002; Adelaja, 2001 & Holm, 2003).

According to Girson (1991: 1), the process of immigration that involves dealing with the circumstances of leaving an old life and finding a new one inevitably causes stress, no matter how resourceful immigrants are. The consequences do not escape the immigrant child who also encounters a unique set of difficulties and experiences in his/her adaptation to a new environment, culture, language, school, and social group.

Girson (1991) states that the role of the school has long been recognised as significant in mediating the values and mores of a culture to its learners and thereby contributing to their healthy socialisation. In a school where there are no school counsellors or psychologists, teachers within that system are in a critical position to ease the young immigrant's adjustment to the new community and to facilitate greater openness on the part of the host community in accepting newcomers. This might be overwhelming for educators who are inadequately prepared for the task.

"Immigration is therefore a process that involves painful separations, ambivalence and experience of loss. The losses encountered are multiple and involve two distinct experiences (Visser, 1987). The first is '*anticipatory loss*', that which the immigrant expects and prepares for. This is usually in relation to tangible objects and may include family, friends and familiar surroundings. Once the transition has occurred, the immigrant experiences '*actual loss*' as he/she begins to confront the loss of support systems; the innate understanding of mores, values and expected responses; the sense of belonging, and the spontaneous communication where a new language has to be learnt" (Girson, 1991).

According to Cropley (1983: 20) there are two sets of factors that cause people to migrate. He says these factors are the push and the pull factors. Cropley defines this as follows:

> "Push factors are the conditions in the homeland which encourage people to leave. These factors can include social turmoil such as war, oppression of various kinds, economic exploitation, feelings of despair or hopelessness, unemployment, starvation, and similar factors. Pull factors are the characteristics of the receiving society, which encourages people to take up residence there. These may include perceived social and economic advantages, a romantic feeling that the receiving society is a land of opportunity, or even deliberate policy on the part of the receiving society to tempt immigrants to leave their homelands and take up life in the new country".

This could be true for immigrants who are living in South Africa. For most immigrants from other African countries the push factors could be stronger than the pull factors. Some immigrant children end up being sent out of their homeland countries with strangers. This is because their parents feel it would be better for their children to be out of the country without them as parents, rather than for the children to experience the oppression and the effects of the war in their country.

The literature reveals that the mere fact of immigrating produces tensions that can cause learners to be excluded in the mainstream activities in the receiving country.

2.5.1 Immigrant Children

By immigrant learners in this study one means learners whose parents are immigrant people. Cropley (1983) states, "…in theory at least three distinct groups of immigrant children can be discerned. The *first* consists of children who arrive in the receiving society having already reached school age; the *second* of children who arrive during pre-school years; and the *third* of children born in the receiving society".

Steedman (1979), as cited in Cropley (1983) stated that the patterns of adjustment in the new society differ for the three groups. Those who arrive after having already reached school age in the homeland possess the habits, beliefs, customs, values, aspirations, and norms of the mother country. Those who arrive at pre-school age show a mixed pattern of socialisation, and those who are born in the receiving society show predominantly the

socialisation patterns characteristic of the receiving society. Steedman maintains that: “The most striking way to refer to any social group which does not seem to fit in and which seems to call for special measures is to refer to it as a ‘problem’ ” (Cropley, 1983: 31).

In the researcher’s experience this has been confirmed in schools in which she has taught. Immigrant learners were seen as a ‘problem’, as they struggled with the academic demands. Barriers arose due to the differences in the spoken language and the language of teaching and learning. In South Africa, it is quite possible that because of the language factor that a learner could be placed in a lower grade. This would result in the learners being older than his/her cohort that can lead to other barriers manifesting. This outcome is confirmed by Bagley cited in Cropley (1983). He summarised the kinds of complaints made by educators about the behaviour of immigrant pupils as “restless, squirming, destructive, quarrelsome, irritable, disobedient, untruthful, dishonest and unresponsive”. Bagley further supports that immigrant learners were ‘frequently isolated’ and that girls were found to be more ‘frequently solitary, miserable and fearful’.

Locals’ stereotypes may arise because the immigrant learners do not speak the language of instruction well, their accents might differ, their choice or style of clothing might differ, and they may often eat different food.

When immigrant learners are seen as the ‘other’ in a school situation there is the potential for the emergence of a strong ‘in-group’ ‘out-group’ or a ‘we’ and ‘they’ relationship

between educators and learners (Cropley, 1983: 81). It is quite possible that if the 'in-group' (educators) is powerful and holds negative stereotypes against the 'out-group' (immigrant learners), a predisposition of its members may emerge which make them react in a negative way to the members of the 'out-group'. This is referred to as 'prejudice' (1983: 83).

Looking at the three different groups of immigrant children, one would expect the children born in the receiving country to adjust more quickly than the other two groups. Research has proven that this is the group that experiences the most difficulty as far as adjusting is concerned (Cropley, 1983: 105). Kovacs and Cropley (1975) cited in Cropley (1983) hypothesised that this reflects the fact that "these children have no first hand experience with the ways of the mother country but are, nonetheless, expected by parents and other fellow countrymen to show familiarity with its norms" (Cropley, 1983: 106).

Immigrant children experience rejection and hostility from their schoolmates. Their peers call them derogatory names such as 'Grigamba', 'Makwerekwere'. This kind of scenario was also adequately sketched in a popular South African television broadcast on a programme called 'Zola 7' on SABC 1 in October 2004. This vignette reflected on the life of an Angolan girl who was treated with hostility and rejection by her schoolmates because of her bad body odour.

Jeffcoate (1976), as cited in Cropley (1983: 109), concluded that immigrants are aware of some prejudice and some immigrants complained that they did not like being called racial

names. At school, immigrant learners expect to be protected against discrimination by educators, who are the adults and seen as the *loco parentis* in the context.

Unfortunately, when it comes to immigrant learners the literature on inclusive education does not accommodate language as a barrier to learning, there is a shortage of publication at the theoretical and practical research level in terms of how to accommodate immigrant learners into inclusive schooling system.

The following chapter looks at the methodology and design of the study.