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Reimagining voice for transrational peace education through participatory arts with South African youth

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Introduction

This project has developed out of a partnership between University of Leeds and The Bishop Simeon Trust South Africa (BST), who work with a number of Safe Parks operating across Ekurhuleni Municipality on the outskirts of Johannesburg, South Africa. Safe Parks are educational and feeding programmes which provide vulnerable children and young people with a warm meal and a safe space to do their homework and undertake recreational activities before and after school (UNICEF 2017). This provision focuses on communities where up to 30% of young people do not have enough to eat each day, where 12% of young people have lost both parents, only 19% of children live with both parents and where 25% of young girls are subjected to frequent sexual abuse (Meintjes et al. 2015). Safe Parks provide young people with a stable, safe environment in which they can build their confidence.

In order for a Safe Park to be eligible to receive statutory state funding, and thus to ensure its sustainability, it should have a functioning youth committee that can help to steer its development. The aim of our project was to use participatory arts – broadly defined as 'the creation of an artwork by professional artists and non-professional artists', often with the intention of generating social change (Matarasso 2017, 2, 5) - to support the development of these youth committees, helping the young people to cultivate the requisite leadership skills both to take on a role in this structure and to help them effect change more broadly in their own lives and the life of their communities. At the heart of this endeavour was the need to support the young people involved to find ways to have their voice not only heard but also listened to, an often challenging goal in a highly hierarchical society such as South Africa.

Although the participatory arts approach was established by the project team, the young people themselves chose the specific arts modes and activities they wanted to use – comic strips, collaging, drama, film. They were then supported by the project team, via a series of workshops, to use these activities to help them identify issues that are important to them but that they do not feel are discussed enough in their communities. Issues range from gender-based violence and xenophobia to sexual exploitation and drug abuse, as well as more positive declarations of what they have achieved as members of the Safe Park, which they feel their wider communities do not necessarily understand. These discussions were then used as the basis of a further set of workshops where they were supported to make and exhibit a film that could be used as a community advocacy tool to generate discussion on the chosen topic. This discussion then led to a period of structured critical reflection, facilitated by The BST, designed to help the young people think about the skills they have developed during the process, how they would like to see the project develop, and what their role in its development could be. Through this process the 'youth leadership' committee is built, structured around, and rooted in, an ethos of youth-led advocacy and activism.

Given the project's focus on building young people's capacity to claim greater voice within their communities through participatory arts practices, our understandings of *voice* were fundamental to our analysis. This article presents the ways in which we engaged with the emerging *transrational* orientation to peace education in order to examine how voice might be understood through participatory arts in this context.

Transrational peace education

Peace education, like many fields of education in the global West and North, is predominantly a modernist field promoting an agenda of enlightenment, autonomy, democracy and 'progress' often based around the nation-state (Cremin 2018; Zembylas and

Bekerman 2013). Critical approaches to peace studies (e.g. Bajaj 2015) have addressed this modernist agenda through the development of critical pedagogies based on dialogue for the analysis of power and cultural/structural violence. Such pedagogies have had, and continue to have, a substantial role to play in raising awareness of structural oppression and offering opportunities for participatory democratic engagement in educational settings in order to prepare students for similar active participation in civil society. However, in recent years peace education scholars have highlighted that critical peace pedagogy is underpinned by a European Enlightenment legacy privileging rationality, psychology, individuality, direct communication and analytic forms of thinking (Cremin et al. 2018; Zembylas 2018). On the one hand, this is a legacy of a form of humanism based on emancipation, putting humans in control of themselves and their lives, desires and behaviour; an attempt to describe a shared humanity in which individuals have the capacity to think for themselves and are free to make rational, ethical choices without the constraints of moral or religious authority (see Grayling 2013). Taking Descartes' pronouncement *cogito ergo sum* – I think, therefore I am – as a fundamental premise, humanism as an ethical outlook has provided a useful underpinning for educational research and philosophy, advocating responsibility for being informed, choosing one's values, working towards one's goals, and living a good life premised on good relationships (ibid., 139, 239). However, despite its claims to universality, humanism has only ever included particular versions of this emancipated individual, specifically those whose language, class, gender, race, sexuality, able-bodiedness, religion and other identity markers conformed to those already established and centralised in the European power base (Pennycook 2018). Descartes' *cogito*, in privileging the mind over the body, established a dualistic conception of difference which maintains a 'colonising logic' (Barad 2014, 169) whereby the self sets an absolute boundary between itself and what it takes to be 'other', excluding, erasing or dominating the other in order to establish and maintain its own

hegemony (ibid., 170). This logic simplifies difference and holds binaries in place – rational/non-rational, individual/collective, human/non-human, self/other – and fails to recognise the differences and similarities *within* the binary terms and within the concept of difference itself (following Trinh Minh-ha 1988). The mind/body separation and its isolating of consciousness from the material world also gave rise to a representational logic in which language stands for meaning waiting to be accessed, part of a hierarchical *arborescent* ontology (Deleuze 2007) where some things conceal or stand above other things which await excavation. Language is representationally central here, our route to accessing meaning, and the 'languaging' subject is separate from the 'languaged' object (MacLure 2013). Critical pedagogy, with its focus on dialogue as preparation for participation in civil society, privileges the 'cognitive imperialism' of the global West and North (Wu et al. 2018), with its representational, 'mind-centric epistemologies' (Kester and Cremin 2017, 1418; see also Zembylas 2018) and verbal orientation (Kurian and Kester 2018).

In response to this critique, calls have been made for pedagogical approaches more consistent with 'the transformative and inclusive purposes of peace education' (Cremin et al. 2018, 295), and which account for the aspects of learning and knowing which critical pedagogies do not enable. The recent proposal for *transrational* pedagogy (Cremin et al. 2018; Dietrich 2019; Kester 2018; Kester and Cremin 2017; Kurian and Kester 2018) neither discards nor overcomes the rational (Dietrich 2012), and neither denies nor accepts the non-rational; rather, it moves across, through and beyond the rational (following Jones 2016). This *trans-ing* (Harvey 2020) enables space for the emotional, embodied, spiritual, sacred, discordant, collective, aesthetic, and metaphysical aspects of peace learning (Cremin et al. 2018, 298; Cremin 2018), and for the entanglement of these with the rational, the psychological, the cognitive and the analytic. In a transrational pedagogical approach:

> the mind is no longer the locus of multiple interpretations of one reality (as in peace approaches reliant on representationalism and voice), but only one of many spaces that occupy the synchronous truths about multiple intersecting possibilities, human and nonhuman. (Kester 2018, 6)

The mind is thus 'provincialised' in a transrational pedagogy: the pedagogue recognises its limits, acknowledges it constructedness, and opens up to a world of knowing beyond and beside/s the mind (following Thurlow 2016, 503). This entails acknowledgement of the inseparable relationship between *knowing* and *being*, or the onto-epistemological entanglements of learning (Barad 2014; Harvey et al. 2019). Such an acknowledgement of the complexity of learning, which does not disconnect students' knowing from their material and metaphysical experience, is needed in order to unsettle the dominant forms and systems of knowledge produced and privileged in the global West and North (Hall and Tandon 2017; Zembylas 2018). The later sections of this paper offer an analysis which engages such a transrational onto-epistemology (Kester 2018). First, we critically consider the concept of *dialogue* so fundamental to critical peace education, and offer a theoretical framework for rethinking and provincialising two key elements of its conceptual underpinnings: *voice* and *language*.

Extending 'dialogue': Provincialising voice and language

In Freirean critical pedagogy, dialogue is the main means of constructing knowledge in order to emancipate. The dualistic relationships critical pedagogy assumes (e.g. oppressor/oppressed, empowered/disempowered) (see Zembylas 2018, 9) depend on a totalising boundary between the self and the other: dialogue takes place between a clear and bounded *I* and *not-I*, with the boundary a barrier to be gradually broken down in order for mutual understanding to be possible and for both parties to develop a more complete consciousness (see MacDonald and O'Regan 2013; Ferri 2018; Harvey 2016). The chief

vehicle of expression in this dialogue is the voice - the singular, unique voice which emanates from a present, intentional, bounded human subject (Mazzei 2013) who 'knows who she [sic] is, says what she means and means what she says' (MacLure 2009, 104). In educational research the voice of this humanist subject is often privileged, assumed to speak the truth of their own experience and to express the 'essence of the self'. Educational researchers may state their commitment to 'letting voices speak for themselves', 'giving voice' or 'making voices heard', freeing the authentic voice from whatever hinders it from fully expressing the true, conscious self (Mazzei and Jackson 2017, 1091). This commitment is frequently, and more or less explicitly, in the service of uncovering hidden meanings, debunking received wisdom, emancipating or empowering the disempowered, and critiquing social and cultural mores – it is based on representational practices in which language 'stands in' for some meaning beneath (see MacLure 2015). Dialogue in this sense therefore fundamentally aims to advance understanding (Kazepides 2012, 915) between bounded and identifiable individuals and groups with the voice and agency to articulate themselves. However, the promise of understanding cannot account for irreconcilable differences or the impossibility of dialogue with the other in contexts of conflict and violence (Phipps 2014; Ferri 2018). If relations with the other are based on tolerance, the relationship is conditional – there will come a point at which the other can no longer be tolerated and the boundary between them must either be acknowledged as insurmountable, or violated through coercion in an attempt to master the other (see Derrida 2001; Ferri 2018).

An expanded conception of dialogue, based on the philosophy of Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g. 1981), rejects representational language and singular agentic voices as the vehicles of dialogue. Rather, voice is material and immanent in the lived moment of the *utterance* (which may be linguistic but may also be a gesture, a look, an object, a silence). The utterance takes place between sociohistorically situated speakers whose voices are always both individual,

expressing their biological and biographical unity in a unique *emotional-volitional* tone (Bakhtin 1993); and social, as they are imbued with the history of the language and the voices of previous speakers (Bakhtin 1981). Through an ongoing process of voice development, speakers author themselves in answer to the world around them, responding to others and putting their own signature to their utterances (Bakhtin 1990). Dialogue in this sense is therefore a constant and dynamic process of embodied engagement with other individual, historical, ideological and social voices; it is both uniquely individual and inescapably social. Voice might therefore be understood as the utterances we make in recognised communicative modes, through which we materially enact our unique biological and biographical selves, in response to other individual and social voices, through which we author ourselves (Harvey 2020). Our utterances are not merely representational but also performative, creating our worlds, constituting our relationships within those worlds, and engaged in our constant learning to be in those worlds – our *ideological becoming* (Harvey 2016, 2017 following Bakhtin 1981). Within this perspective, the self/other boundary is not total and there is no promise of understanding. Rather, understanding is an ongoing relationship *on* the boundary, a lived, creative, dynamic and unfinalised place where difference is both within and without (Bakhtin 1981, 1990). This is therefore a materially- and morally-conscious perspective in which responsibility, care and concern for the other *qua* other inheres, and in which our utterances and our voices are fundamental to this responsibility.

This perspective therefore moves closer to an understanding of the relationship between knowing and being in its acknowledgment of the material, embodied, and collective dimensions of voice. In the following sections, we demonstrate how this perspective provided a philosophical underpinning for a theoretically expanded understanding of voice which engages a transrational onto-epistemology.

Voice as method

As the field researcher on the project, Lou Harvey had two five-day field visits at one Safe Park in 2018, and then the same period at another Safe Park in 2019. Both Safe Parks were roughly a 40-minute drive from Johannesburg, and Lou attended with BST for the morning, if the children were attending during school holidays, or the afternoon if it was school term time. On some days Paul Cooke accompanied us. Most of the data presented here is from the visits in May and June 2018. Given the brevity of the visits, Lou engaged three qualities of short-term ethnography (following Pink and Morgan 2013, 355-9):

> 1) intense research encounters, recognising herself as entangled in the context and making the research a 'humanising space' (Green 2020) by actively placing herself in the action and joining in with the children;
>
> 2) an 'ongoing ethnographic-analytical-theoretical dialog' which involved several presentations of preliminary work to peers, focused conversations among the project team, and continuous dialogue with literature on voice from different philosophical and disciplinary fields (elaborated below);
>
> 3) in-depth engagement with filmed and audio-recorded 'traces' of encounters, as ongoing forms of re-engagement with the context.

In an effort to avoid methodocentrism (Weaver and Snaza 2017), we began the inquiry with concept rather than methodology (following Colebrook 2013, in Mazzei 2017, 675), moving 'towards philosophy and away from method' and following 'concepts as a contour for inquiry' (ibid.). Following Wu et al. (2018) and their call to trouble 'the tyranny of methods'

by ‘working against the normalizing tendency of research that reduces knowing to process and step-by-step guidelines that privilege presence over absence’ (508), we now present three sections which move across, through and beyond the traditional boundaries of theoretical framework, methodology, analysis, findings and discussion, engaging all of these as commensurate with the *trans-* lens we are adopting. Our understanding of these terms and their boundaries has been provoked by the problem of voice in this context and how it relates to voice in traditional qualitative inquiry, and has been transformed, along with our understanding of voice, by the contours of the different concepts discussed below (Mazzei 2017). We recognise that we cannot separate ourselves, or the theory, from the ‘data’, its generation or its analysis (Wu et al. 2018).

Each of the following sections is therefore structured around a different insight into voice as these emerged through the project, describing the methods, theoretical perspectives, practices, encounters, data, and thinking through which these insights came about, and culminating in our conceptualisation of transrational voice.

A transrational approach to voice

Voice as collectively produced

On her first afternoon at the Safe Park, Lou first experienced the painful awareness of her linguistic incompetence (Phipps 2013) in this context of dynamic multilingualism, as she realised the extent to which her research competence depended on language. She understood little of what was being said around her; although the adults spoke English, not many of the children did, and it did not make sense to them to just speak English alone without employing their other languages. So the possibility of focus groups or interviews was unavailable, except through translation; she was unable to ask people what things were about.

After the introductions and greetings, Lou set herself up at the end of the table in a corner of the shipping container which functioned as the workspace, with her notepad and her range of coloured biros ready to make her fieldnotes. This became her daily routine. After the first couple of days, when the children had got used to her, the same two, sometimes three, younger girls, would cluster round where she was writing her fieldnotes and take her pens and sheets of paper from her notepad. They took them to the desk at the back of the container, where there were some stationery items like a pair of scissors and a glue stick, and they opened a drawer in a filing cabinet and took out magazines and promotional supermarket leaflets. They started cutting pictures from these and gluing them onto the notepaper in collages, alongside using the pens for writing, drawing and colouring. Lou went to the desk with them and watched as they worked, and we pointed out pictures of things we liked and, in their case, knew the English words for – pizza, cornflakes, car. The children were very happy doing this and when they had filled their notepaper they held their collages up proudly to show Lou, running to find her if she was not there, and asking her to take a photograph:

Figure 1: Collage 1

Figure 2: Collage 2

The boy in the picture below did not make the collage – he saw Lou taking photographs of the others, came to take a collage, and held it up in front of her and posed to be photographed:

Figure 3: Collage 3

Lou's pens played a significant role in this activity. The children would spread them over their table and then bicker, sometimes quite loudly, about who was going to get the different colours. At one point one girl fastened a handful of pens to the breast pocket of her school dress, and wore them proudly, coming to Lou for a photo:

Figure 4: Pens in pocket 1

Another girl saw her doing this, and filled her own pocket with pens and posed for a photo:

Figure 5: Pens in pocket 2

Then a younger boy, who had not been involved in the collaging/colouring but had been watching us take photos, also put some pens in his pocket and wanted a photo:

Figure 6: Pens in pocket 3

Throughout these activities, the anxious question gnawed at Lou: How do I understand the children's voices? These activities, products and photographs clearly mattered to the children, but she did not know how to interpret them; she was unable to ask the children why they were significant, or what they meant. They did not satisfy what MacLure (2013) would call her 'rage for explanation and meaning' – they refused to offer themselves up as signification (2013, 662, 664). Therefore, given that language, and the representational meaning she relied on as a qualitative researcher, was not available to her, she had to work with what *was* available to her other than language: the materials, bodies, affects, spaces.

To do so she drew on new materialist thinkers (e.g. MacLure 2013; Mazzei and Jackson 2017; see also Harvey et al. 2019) and their engagement with Deleuzian thinking to look beyond and besides language. In an extension of Bakhtin's materiality, a new materialist perspective considers language as one of many materials which are mutually implicated, or entangled with each other, on the same ontological plane. This engages a *rhizomatic* ontology (Deleuze 2007): a flat surface, with no hierarchies or binary oppositions, in which 'language is deposed from its god-like centrality in the construction and regulation of worldly affairs, to become one element in a manifold of forces and intensities that are moving, connecting and diverging' (MacLure 2013, 660). In this ontology, language is part of *assemblages*: 'states of things, bodies, various combinations of bodies, hodgepodges … utterances, modes of expression, and whole regimes of signs' (Deleuze 2007, 177). This enables a move away from language as representational, as *meaning* something, and towards thinking performatively, in terms of what is *produced* when language is understood as one element among many. If language is understood as a material ontologically inseparable from other materials in the assemblage, it becomes provincialised (Thurlow 2016) – it no longer sits at the top of a hierarchy, but is entangled with/in the many entities which constitute the assemblage. This new materialist orientation disrupts binary, colonising logic and complexifies difference – it does not erase or efface difference, as difference 'is not opposed to sameness, nor synonymous with separateness' (Trinh Minh-ha 1988, 75), but rather draws attention to relations of 'difference within' (Barad 2014, 175). This was a very important point for Lou, with her background in language and intercultural learning: in this context our lack of a shared language drew particular attention to our difference, but even had we shared a language, there would be no promise of understanding. Lou therefore had to accept being unable to understand much sooner than she might have done in circumstances where she

could engage linguistically, and so was able to consider what affordances might open up from not-understanding.

Looking beyond and besides language, then, and thinking in terms of assemblages, meant thinking about the materials, bodies, affects, spaces, in different ways. This in turn meant reconfiguring our relationship to the world to include less hierarchical and more dynamic understandings of different forms of matter, considering both human and non-human materialities as having 'thing-power' (Bennett 2010a, 2). We began to see things as 'themselves actors alongside and within us … vitalities, trajectories and powers irreducible to the meanings, intentions or symbolic values humans invest in them' (Bennett 2010b, 47). There were so many things involved in the making of the collages: the children, Lou, the paper, the pens, the magazines, the supermarket leaflets, the words and pictures on the page, the words we were saying to each other, the glue, the scissors, the desk, Lou's iPad camera, the space of the shipping container. All of these things were 'bonafide agents rather than … instrumentalities, techniques of power, recalcitrant objects, or social constructs' (Bennett 2010b, 47). They were agents acting with a force. And voice emerged from the assemblage of all these things as fundamentally collective, a posthuman voice produced in 'a complex network of human and nonhuman agents that exceeds the traditional notion of the individual' (Mazzei 2013, 738) and distributed across human and non-human actors (Pennycook 2018). The desire for collaging and the pens, and to be photographed with them, originally started with two of the younger girls, but it was 'eventful … it moved outward' (MacLure 2013, 662) beyond the girls to the other children, to the two boys. These things mattered: they were part of the children's engagements with their world.

In this context, therefore, language was not available to explain or represent the collages; the collages could only represent themselves as part of the *production* of voice within this particular assemblage of bodies, materials, spaces and affects. Thus voice can be

seen here not as an innate attribute of individual human beings, but rather as a collective production of 'a thing that is entangled with other things in an assemblage' (Mazzei and Jackson 2017, 1090, following Deleuze and Guattari 1987), inseparable from the assemblage in which it was produced, and with no representational resemblance to anything except the whole (Mazzei and Jackson 2017). Voice, therefore, is collectively produced.

Voice as individually uttered

There were also activities in which language played a more audible role. The following example is an extract from a music video that the children chose to make when asked what they would like to do with some of the camera equipment. The children organised themselves into a group of singers, and then individuals took turns with the camera to film, while Paul helped them to take the shots they wanted and instructed them on basic filming technique.

Figure 7: Music video [two photos and audio file]

Here, although Lou and Paul knew the gist of the love song the children are singing, they did not understand the Zulu words. Even after a translation – *I love you my baby, my sweetie, I only love you* - the words did not make sense in terms of signification, and were not particularly helpful for understanding what was being communicated - indeed, a logocentric mindset and focus on the words might actually be obfuscating. However, there is plenty to hear if we listen differently (Weaver and Snaza 2017), and focus not on *what* is uttered but on *how* it is uttered (Di Matteo 2015). The children sing joyfully in a call-and-response pattern. They clap and dance together, in unison, radiating energy and joy and playfulness. The lead singer calls, for the group to respond; she and the group, and her voice and the collective voice, constitute each other. She is an *I* as well as a *we*, a specific individual making an

emission of sound from her body. This uniqueness is not accounted for in the posthuman perspective of voice as collective – it does not account for the individual embodiment of the voice, the 'nondiscursive materiality of voicing' (Magnat 2018, 434). Here, Lou turned to studies of singing and the work of Adriana Cavarero, who argues that throughout the history of western philosophy, the *message* of the voice has been privileged over the *material* of the voice, in what she calls the 'devocalisation of logos' (2005, 40). This is the separation of *semantike* and *phone*, where *semantike* is what is signified, or the logocentric voice; and *phone* is 'the acoustically perceptible phenomenon of uniqueness … the echo that comes from the mouth for the ear of the other' (2005, 212). According to Cavarero, 'the human voice is grasped within a system of signification that subordinates speech to the concept' (2005, 34). Logos, understood in humanist, rationalist, Eurocentric terms, is *reason* and *language* (Thomaidis 2015, 10), and the sound-voice is but a bearer of utterances - 'a secondary thing, substance to be put to use' (Saussure 1959, 118). This logocentrism 'undermines all those vocal sounds we produce which are not destined to language' (Karikis 2015, 79) – or, to extend this argument, to signification.

In problematising the logocentricity of voice, Cavarero offers the possibility for understanding speech 'from the perspective of voice instead of from the perspective of language' (2005, 14). Attending to *phone*, or the materiality of the voice, means understanding it as a reaching out, a connection from one embodied individual to another (Cavarero 2005). Here, voice is individually uttered, but that utterance is not the rational expression of the humanist subject: rather, this perspective 'recognises the singularity of each human life before the human becomes an abstract category, an identity whose meaning relies on language' (Burgess and Murray 2006, 168). Attention therefore shifts away from *what* is being said to *who* is speaking, to the voice as a material bridge between a uniquely embodied speaker and their listener. This is what Bakhtin calls the *emotional-volitional tone* (1993) and

what Barthes calls the *grain* of the voice, 'the materiality of the body which emerges from the throat … where the phonic metal hardens and takes shape' (Barthes 1985, 255). Fundamentally, the voice 'reveals nothing but itself', but 'it must be heard for this revelation to occur' (Linsley 2015, 198, following Cavarero 2005). The voice is simultaneously 'inner' and 'outer', individual and interrelational (Tjersland 2019), and there must always be a listener in the chain of communication (Bakhtin 1981), but that listener must know to listen to the *how*, the process, rather than the *what*, the object. Understanding voice as sound means understanding voice as a dynamic, transient, relational event – in this song, we hear voice individually uttered, not as a being but as a becoming (Cavarero 2005, 37).

Voice as both individually uttered and collectively produced

We now return to Lou's very first day in the field. She arrived, was introduced to people, and waved and smiled a lot at the children, who were shy and peeped at her from behind corners and other, bigger children. She was invited to introduce herself to them and showed them pictures of where she comes from, where she lives and works, her husband and children. This, and particularly the pictures of her children, was a wonderful ice-breaker and by the time she finished the children were all gathered around her, jostling to see the iPad, leaning over her shoulders from behind and the smaller ones climbing onto her knees. Lou's fieldnotes continue:

> After my introduction, the children arrange themselves into a kind of classroom setup, sitting along the wall with their chairs in two straight rows. Individual children stand up before the group to read texts they have written, in English, on what their Safe Park means to them. They read shyly and haltingly, like children who've been asked to read something out by their teacher. The rest of the group sit still and silent. After each reading, we clap six times – clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, and say 'Halala', in acknowledgement and gratitude for sharing their stories. Two older girls tell their stories in Zulu and Tsonga, giving very animated readings. I can't hear or understand everything but I know the stories are traumatic, telling of neglect, alcoholism and drug addiction, and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Two overarching themes

> are that their Safe Park feeds them and helps them to learn. I wonder how they've come to write these texts, and later my suspicion is confirmed that they were specially prepared for my coming, so I could hear their stories. (Fieldnotes, May 2018)

The Safe Park leaders knew that Lou was there to hear the children's voices, and considered that this would be served by asking the children to write their life stories, in English as far as possible, and read them aloud individually, in front of the class. The children clearly did not all want to tell their stories, and very few of them appeared to be comfortable with this mode of expression: even when the older girls were speaking, their audience's attention, though they were making efforts to be polite, was flagging. There was therefore an understanding among the leaders that *semantike* and *phone* were both important – they wanted the children to tell their stories in their own voices – but this was within the authoritative discourse of the colonial classroom, where the children were doing it because they were told to do it. This illustrates the authoritative discourses (Bakhtin 1981) of education at play: the traditional classroom where children are told what to do, in the prestige language, demonstrates a colonising logic (Barad 2014) in which the children's own voices, in terms of both *semantike* and *phone,* are marginalised. This was an uncomfortable moment for Lou, understanding as she did that these decisions had been taken under the weight of colonial history (N'gugi Wa 1986), and of the Safe Park leaders' expectations of what she herself would expect to see. Even more uncomfortable was their expectation that she was there to hear the children's stories of pain and trauma, a common trope of 'storying towards pain', a damage-centred approach to qualitative research which is exploitative and pathologising of groups considered Other (Green 2020).

Following the readings, the children had a play-break:

> After the story readings the care worker calls for a ten-minute break, so the children can move about and 'refresh their minds'. The children beckon me outside to join their game, which involves one person dancing around the middle of the circle while the rest of the group chant, then calling 'My name is … and I do like [an action or a

> dance move]'. The rest of the group copy what they have called ['My name is …'], and then copy their move. They call this twice, then rejoin the circle, and another comes in. After several people have run in and out, a boy next to me nudges me and tells me 'you should go in'. Then the boy in the middle comes straight towards me on his way out and pulls me in. They laugh and cheer at me dancing in the circle – they can see I'm a bit uncomfortable but it doesn't matter, it's the participation that matters. After this game we play another, similar one, where the person in the middle calls 'I do like I do…' and performs a gesture or dance move. Again, after a few rounds the person exiting the circle comes towards me, inviting me to fill the space. For the next game we line up in two opposite rows and do a dance which reminds me of traditional Scottish dancing, where we all have to dance up the line and back down again, linking elbows with the people dancing towards us. We repeat this and a boy in front of me keeps enthusiastically turning round and telling me 'no touching this time', 'still no touching', to make sure I'm abreast of the rules of the current round. If anyone touches someone else accidentally, it's the end of the game. The children are so very different playing these games from when they were standing up to read out their stories – noisy, cheerful, engaged with their bodies and voices and emotions – and where they were previously shy of me, they're now assertive, telling me to join in and how to do it. These are children with voice – these are children expressing themselves. 'My name is. And I do like I do'. (Lou, Fieldnotes, May 2018)

When the children moved out of the logocentric classroom and into the playful, gestural, sonic, tactile world of their games – when they were doing what they wanted to do, in activities directed by them – they were transformed. They were in charge in this space, and they were all engaged and participating fully, with loud, confident voices, in a move towards 'otherwise storying' (Green 2020) whose range 'far exceeds the single note of pain' (Patel 2020, 131). The meaning of their words mattered as much as the sound of their voices; *semantike* and *phone* were bound up together, but this time in an internally persuasive way (Bakhtin 1981), a way that was meaningful to the children. And their words were a significant part of the performance, but were not the only performance: the children were speaking and also dancing their names as part of their individual utterances. Their voices were therefore both individually uttered, and at the same time collectively produced through the arrangement of the circle in which they danced in and out, in the whole-group clapping and chanting and listening to and repeating the names. The individual and the circle constituted each other; they were both part of, and emerged from, the collective.

At the end of the week all the Safe Parks came together for a showcase event, where they showed the performances and films they had made to each other and a group of invited local and regional guests from educational, child support and social work organisations. Many of the performances took the form of a group prayer or lament, where children stood in two or three rows, holding hands or clasping them in prayer, and singing or humming a repeated melody. Then individuals would take turns to come forward and tell their stories and their suffering, in whatever languages they chose. At our Safe Park the children had decided to all end their stories with a direct plea to the audience, in English: 'Can you take it? Can you? I thought so.'

Figure 8: Showcase performance [three photos and audio file]

We have not translated this young woman's words from Xitsonga into English, as we do not have her permission to reproduce her full story here. However, her performance demonstrates that the message and the material of the voice - *semantike* and *phone* - are bound together in an internally persuasive utterance. This young woman narrated her own story and performed it in her own embodied voice, full of anger and suffering, an individual emerging from and then re-merging with the collective, constituted by the collective which she too constituted. Her voice is an internally persuasive one, in contrast to the authoritative discourse the children were negotiating in the classroom on my first day. Again, the voice as message and the voice as material are individually uttered, at the same time as they are collectively produced through the assemblage of bodies, spaces, affects, materials, words; through the group of which she is a part and through the audience to whom she supplicates. Here, and in the game described above, voice performs a *trans-ing* move (Lou 2020) across, through and beyond *semantike* and *phone*, mind and body, individual and collective, representation and

performance. Voice is *uttered* through unique individual bodies, and *produced* in the complex assemblages of which those individual bodies are a part; utterance and production constitute each other, just as the individual and the collective constitute each other. This analysis of voice, as both individually uttered and collectively produced, is transrational because it not only accounts for both the conscious/individual/cognitive/analytic and the unconscious/collective/embodied/affective, but also demonstrates how voice complexifies these domains, moving across, through and beyond. It rejects post-Enlightenment representational, binary logic while still accounting for language, provincialising this as part of many materials inhabiting the same ontological plane in complex assemblages; and accounting for the human as a becoming bound up with knowing, engaged in an ongoing process of learning to be with other human and non-human others in the world.

Transrational learning through participatory arts

Although the project team established the arts-based approach for the project, the specific activities were chosen and entirely led by the children, which meant that they were able to take decisions about *how* and *what* they voiced; by enabling a range of options for *how* to communicate, it opened up greater possibilities for *what* they communicated. The children were able to tell their stories and equally to *not* tell their stories, and equally to combine the telling and the not-telling; they could tell of their suffering, and/or do a dance, sing a song, draw a picture, make a collage. Because the adults on the project took the conditions of their lives seriously, including their wish to play, audibility became a possibility for them: they regularly asked Lou 'will you show our pictures to your children?', and expressed delight that 'others can see our film'. The confidence gained from feeling heard meant the children started to understand themselves as valuable individuals, part of a wider community of people who care about them, and who they can go to when they need help. They began to develop

awareness of their responsibility for themselves, of the need to 'look after our bodies and our minds'; and also of their responsibility for each other, of their duty to 'help our brothers and sisters to speak'. They began to understand the ways in which their community can help and support them and also how the relationship between individual and community might be complex, and 'close doors for us' (see Seehawer 2018). In the 2019 round of the project, the first showcase event in July saw eight Safe Parks presenting various performances, including films about children in traumatic circumstances relating to drug use, sexual exploitation, pregnancy and HIV/AIDS, in which adults were abusive, exploitative, neglectful or absent. All the films, with the exception of one, ended with a child committing suicide because they could see no way out of the circumstances in which they found themselves. In the second showcase event in November, all the films showed the children surviving and managing, often through engaging the help and support of adults in the community – teachers, parents, medical professionals, care workers, police, pastors. For us as the project team, this was the best indicator of the project's success; this, and the questions that the two young people acting as masters of ceremonies for the event unexpectedly posed to BST and Lou from the stage:

> MC 1: Martin, what is your professional view on child participation?
> Martin from BST: The South African Constitution and the Universal Convention on the Rights of the Child [Article 12] say that "Every child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and to have their views taken seriously". Child participation is essential for our support to work well. Children are the experts on their life experience and it would be a mistake for us to think that we can create solutions to the challenges they face in their lives without their involvement. So child participation is how we make sure that what we are doing is well informed and has the right impact.
> MC 2: Dr Lou, do you know any organisations that support child protection, safeguarding, and child participation?
> Lou: Your Safe Parks! They can also help you find other adults you can trust, in your schools, churches, and the police.

This reversal of power was a stressful moment for Martin and Lou – being put on the spot, from a stage, in a room of around 300 people - and a very welcome one. This moment of holding power to account, in this highly hierarchical society, gave us the possibility of hope for the future of these young people.

The arts-based approach facilitated theoretical expansion of our understanding of voice and learning by demonstrating how voice is both individually uttered and collectively produced in the children's complex engagements with their world. The arts-based approach enabled us to understand voice as *trans-ing*, uttered and produced across, through and beyond the emotional, embodied, collective and aesthetic, and the rational, the cognitive and the analytic. We thus engaged a transrational onto-epistemology which acknowledged and accounted for the complexity of learning and knowing as inseparable from being-in-the-world (Barad 2014; Harvey et al. 2019; Kester 2018). This transrational analysis of voice, as both individually uttered and collectively produced, points to the children's learning as a process of ideological becoming (Bakhtin 1981; Harvey 2016, 2017), of individuation *from and within* the collective. This is a process of growing awareness that all dimensions of life and learning are part of myriad, complex ongoing relationships with the human and non-human actors in their immediate surroundings, with their local communities, and with the authoritative discourses which shape the socio-political conditions of their lives. And awareness that although their roles in these relationships move and shift according to time, place, and context, they are always functioning relationally, always 'dynamically interacting and creatively transforming at the contact boundary at work' (Tjersland 2019, 296).

Conclusion: Transrational potential for decolonising education

Walter Mignolo notes that decolonial thinking is the 'relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity' (2003,

10). We see a transrational approach to education as offering the potential to 'exercise theoretical and practical decoloniality' by provincialising hegemonic educational norms (Kester et al. 2019, 275), but only contingent on working within the discomfort, messiness, and pain which overcoming the logic of coloniality necessitates. Our project exercised practical decoloniality by providing unstructured space for young people to play and hang out as part of the educational process (see Goessling 2020). Through the children's play in this project and their invitation to Lou to join their games, decolonising moments arose where the children were in control, telling Lou what to do, laughing at her awkwardness, creating momentary shifts in relationships 'towards an equality that was not possible under the previous arrangements' (Phipps 2019, 23). This shift was ephemeral – it would be naïve to think the power relations simply melted away – but, if only briefly, 'a new set of relations [came] into being' (ibid.). A similar shift took place when the children questioned Martin and Lou from the stage, for those few decolonising moments. We exercised theoretical decoloniality by undermining the modernist, representationalist foundations of qualitative educational research (MacLure 2013) in two ways. Firstly, in our necessary methodological awkwardness and theoretical promiscuity, for decolonising research is not 'something you can clean up theoretically or conceptually and have a correct methodological framework for developing' (Phipps 2019, 7); and secondly, by provincialising representational language (Thurlow 2016) in order to analyse the children's voice, communication and learning beyond a post-Enlightenment, colonising frame. However, we are conscious that local languages have been absent from this analysis owing to a monolingualism and Global North-centrism which is itself a product of the modernist, Eurocentric legacy we critique in this paper. This requires us to make clear that a transrational analysis which considers voice as individually uttered and collectively produced in complex assemblages must account for the ways in which named languages operate in a highly politicised context *while also* provincialising

representational language as a mode of communication. In other words, it must account for how named languages, and indeed the naming of languages, functions as part of the assemblage. This means engaging with the history, effects and assumptions of the global dominance of English, working with South African researchers who understand the complexity and fluidity of the linguistic context and the 'infinite relations of interdependency between languages and literacies' (Makalela 2016, 187), and with African philosophies such as Ubuntu (Seehawer 2018; Wu et al. 2018). We must also acknowledge our inextricability from these systems and ideologies, that we are always already within; and that the knowledge we produce within them is both worthwhile and contingent, both liberating and violent (see Wu et al. 2018), and always unfinished. For the potential of the transrational for decolonisation is also in its acceptance of contradiction, of processes of 'learning with and through difference', and knowing that 'the hope for an arrival at a common, collective place of understanding is to deny the necessity of constant difference' (Phipps 2019, 11). A transrational decolonising approach must be about welcoming differences, disjunctions, contradictions and complexities as a 'field of transformative potentials' (Tjersland and Ditzel Facci 2019, 247) and working to interrupt the dominant structures of knowledge creation by letting go of the 'tyranny of understanding' (Barker 2015, xix; Wu et al. 2018). It is both an ongoing long-term project and a series of moments, brief in time but significant in weight and resonance.

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