

A Researcher's Journey through Complexity, Reflexivity and Transformation: a Case Study from Rwanda

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Rwanda is a land-locked Central African country faced with two major challenges - ensuring recovery, rehabilitation and reconciliation after the genocide of 1994, and the massive need for sustainable development. Within this context education and health reform are playing an important role in reconciliation, reconstruction and development. The first author spent two years in Rwanda and established a primary and a lower secondary school. For the two years that the first author lived in Rwanda, she worked with teachers and students and was struck by their resilience, simplicity, hope and determination. This paper highlights the voices of teachers as they struggled to achieve against great odds. The first author's personal journey has been examined over the course of the research study and her voice has been used to speak from socio-cultural and practical perspectives. Through personal reflections and use of narratives, the present study involved interactions with teachers which enabled the first author to embark on a transformative process and understand the complexity of school reform in a transitional society.

The Landlocked Transitional Central African Nation of Rwanda

Rwanda, a small landlocked country in east central Africa, is called the land of a thousand hills or, in French, Mille Collines. Rwanda lies just south of the equator at a height of five thousand feet, enjoys a cool climate most of the year and is bound on the west by Zaire, on the south by Burundi, on the east by Tanzania and on the north by Uganda. The northern region is dominated by the lofty peaks of the Virunga volcanoes and is home to the world-renowned mountain gorillas (Carr & Halsey, 1999).

The history of pre-colonial Rwanda has been passed down through oral tradition. Before colonisation, towards the end of the 19th century, most of Rwanda was a monarchy ruled by a king. The Germans colonised Rwanda from 1899-1916. After the First World War, Rwanda was assigned as a trusteeship to Belgium. The Belgians followed a policy of indirect rule favouring the Tutsis and this resulted in political and administrative monopoly in the hands of the aristocratic Tutsi (Eriksson, 1996). At the end of the 1950s there was a sudden shift in the trend towards decolonisation, when the Belgian trusteeship powers decided to give up their support of the Tutsis and instead supported the rising Hutu leadership. This decision led to the uprising of 1959. General elections were held in 1961, the monarchy was abolished, a presidential system of governance was introduced and Rwanda gained independence in 1962. Independence was followed by heightened ethnic tensions between Hutus and Tutsis causing flows of Tutsi refugees from Rwanda to Uganda, Burundi, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Percival & Homer-Dixon, 1995).

October 1990 was the start of a three-year civil war that left 65000 Rwandans dead and displaced more than a million people. The war caused massive destruction of the national parks and wildlife was slaughtered. The natural habitat of the mountain gorillas was destroyed and the veterinary research centres in the volcanic mountains were destroyed. Farmers from Rwanda's most fertile region were forced to abandon their fields causing a severe food shortage and mass starvation. The displaced people of Rwanda were filled with bitterness at the devastation to their country, their homes and the insecurity of their situation. With the assassination of the President in April 1994, the country dissolved into a state of anarchy and terror. Extremist Hutu militia groups using guns, machetes and axes slaughtered Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Tutsis fled in fear of their lives and Hutus fled in fear of retaliation. On July 4, 1994, the Tutsi rebels gained power in Rwanda. This caused the greatest mass flight of people in modern times. Two million Hutus fled across the borders into Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire within a few days. The vast majority of those who fled were innocent of any wrongdoing (Carr & Halsey, 1999).

Today, eleven years after the genocide, Rwanda is a country struggling to reconcile its traditional way of life with a new Africa at the dawn of the 21st century. Much has still remained the same in Rwanda. Many villages have no electricity or telephone. Food is prepared on a wood-burning stove or with charcoal in many homes all over the country. The only light in the evening is candlelight and kerosene lanterns (Carr & Halsey, 1999). It is a land of immense pain and hope that is rebuilding and reconstructing eleven years after the genocide of 1994.

Overview of the Current Education System in Rwanda

There have been three major education projects in Rwanda since the mid-1970s. The first project, dealing with general education and increasing access to primary schooling in Rwanda, was implemented in 1977 and completed in 1983; the second project, approved in 1982, supported secondary education. The third project, approved in 1986, included assistance for improving the quality of primary and post-primary education and management capacity of each of these education sectors (World Bank, 2000). The transitional Government of National Unity, sworn in during July, 1994, decided to reopen all primary and secondary schools by January, 1995 as a means of healing and reconciliation after the genocide. Subsequently, a post-conflict emergency education program was implemented (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The main educational objective of the government in Rwanda has been to expand access to, and improve the quality of, education. The government has also tried to improve access and equity among all prefectures in Rwanda. Although the government has tried to improve the quality of education, this has proven a difficult task: only 22% of the student population completes primary education and about 40% of the teachers are qualified and have been provided with teaching material (International Monetary Fund, 2001). There are insufficient books and resources for all the students in the country. The current government in Rwanda regards education as a priority project for the achievement of national development and has adopted five national goals - eradication of illiteracy, universal primary education, teacher training, national capacity building in science and technology, and improving the teaching of mathematics and sciences (Ministry of Education, 1998).

Between April and May 1996, a Commission led by a curriculum design specialist from Canada was appointed by the Ministry of Education in Rwanda to harmonise the primary and secondary curriculum in all subjects and to produce a new curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 1996). The commission developed a draft curriculum and the final curriculum documents were published in French and English and presented to schools in September, 1998 (Ministry of Education, 1998). It is against this contextual background that this study was carried out.

Education for Socio-economic Development

Since their independence in the late 1950s and 1960s, most African states have become acutely aware of the importance of education as a means to accomplish economic development. Like other developing regions of the world, Africa has been eager to develop its scientific and technological power and to attain a measure of self-reliance in the production of goods and services (Ogunniyi, 1996). Most African countries have expanded their educational facilities by investing in curriculum development centres, science and technology institutes, national examination boards and curriculum research and evaluation units. The CASTAFRICA II summit, held in Tanzania in 1987, noted several factors that have affected the development of education in Africa. These factors include the rapid deterioration of the environment, the increase in the rate of pollution, population growth, the increase in HIV/AIDS, rise in infant mortality, the external indebtedness, the consequent policies of adjustment, unsuitability of development policies and the poor management of resources (UNESCO - CASTAFRICA II, 1987).

Many developing countries invest heavily in education to strive for socio-economic development (Lee, 1992). The science for development model put forward by Drori (1998) works on the assumption that a government envisions education, especially science education, as a systematic programme for national development with a scientifically and technically skilled labour force that enables industrialisation and, in turn, economic progress. The leaders in Rwanda have acknowledged the need for national capacity building in science and technology and are trying to ensure that education will facilitate development, environmental sustainability and enable the young to change, transform and work collectively to create a better future (Ministry of Education, 1998).

In the case of Rwanda, the National Curriculum Development Centre made use of experienced teachers in the design of the new curriculum. Many of these teachers had taught in other countries such as Kenya, Uganda and South Africa and had returned to Rwanda after the genocide, bringing their own professional experiences into the curriculum development process (Ministry of Education, 1996). Continued professional growth of teachers is widely accepted as an essential ingredient to any educational reform and school renewal (Fullan, 1998; Van den Akker, 1998).

A Conceptual Framework on the Rationale for Exploring School Renewal

School reform and renewal is a complex process that affects the working lives of teachers and administrators. For teachers and administrators facing school renewal, whether it is school-based curriculum development or a systemic initiative with origins in the school and system restructuring, there are many uncertainties, tensions, constraints, paradoxes or dilemmas (Hargreaves, et al., 2001). Within school systems undergoing reform, many administrators and principals face daily dilemmas as they balance the requirements of education departments with decisions made within schools (Wildy, 1998).

Soder (1999) establishes the tone for future perceptions and conceptualisations of school renewal. He notes that renewal is an "...alternative approach" to the more static concept of educational reform, "...which is more of a government approach to fix education with policies that do not account for economic and social factors of student and teacher populations" (Soder, 1999, p.568). Renewal is more inclusive and by implication democratic – a continuing, unfolding narrative, told and controlled by those involved. School renewal takes into account such factors (ie, social and economic) by envisioning change as a continuing process that recognises the pre-eminent roles played by individuals and communities for bringing about lasting, meaningful change (Silcox, et.al 2003).

The need for redesigning school education and redefining its aims and objectives in Rwanda is linked to changes occurring in society, economy, politics and education in the aftermath of the genocide. Consequences of this are the new needs of present day Rwandan society with changes in economic structure, the knowledge and skills with which students need to be equipped and the changes in the social context of education (Earnest, 2003). This study has tried to develop insights to understand teachers' knowledge and practices so that this understanding can be made available to others. This paper includes those issues about which the teachers were most vocal: justice, gender, ethnic tensions, language and poverty and is written in a way to make these teachers' voices and visions clearly heard.

An Interpretive Case Study

Through this case study we have tried to provide a holistic description of factors affecting and influencing the school renewal process. According to Giroux (1991), researchers need to place themselves in their work in terms of sex, race and culture in order to determine and negotiate the stance taken with participants. As a head teacher, the first author had worked in Rwanda for two years from 1997 to 1999, established a school, hired and worked with local teachers and implemented the new curriculum of the Rwandan Ministry of Education (Earnest, 2003).

This research focuses on the socio-cultural context of the post-genocide period, thus becoming "more than an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a social phenomenon. Concerns with the socio-political and cultural contexts are what set this study apart" (Merriam, 1998, p. 23). Using Niyozov's (2001) representations, research was bound in space (the tiny land-locked nation of Rwanda), time (the post-genocide period), population (teachers and students), focus (context, curriculum, school environment, beliefs and dilemmas) and scale (primary and lower secondary schools). It was also interpretive, based on the first author's experiences of living and working in Rwanda (Earnest, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

Critical Reflexivity

Through personal reflections, the present study involved interactions with teachers that enabled the first author to embark on a transformative process and understand the complexity of the education reform process in Rwanda (Giroux, 1991). The researchers' critique and reflexivity, as advocated by Fonow and Cook (1991), is concerned with the critical awareness of her assumptions, beliefs and actions (or the researcher's 'voice' in the enquiry). Critical reflexivity acknowledges that the researcher was an integral part of the setting (Patton, 2002).

Most importantly, reflexivity in research allows more space for the voice of the people who are being studied. I wrote vignettes that took into account social action that is “locally distinct and situationally contingent” (Erickson, 1998, p. 1155) and was designed to develop a clearer picture of the interplay of factors. According to Gergen (1995, p. 25), meaning is achieved through dialogue and communication between two or more persons and is concerned with “negotiation, co-operation, conflict, rhetoric, rituals, roles and social scenarios....” Indeed, the lives of the Rwandese are in a constant process of co-operation, negotiation, survival and reconciliation, especially in the post-genocide period (Earnest, 2003).

The Use of Story and Narrative

Socio-historical qualitative research stresses that any phenomenon, including teaching, has meaning only within a context which illuminates its history, development, underlying assumptions, current location and future trends (Hathaway, 1995; Merriam, 1998). Storytelling as cultural representation and as a sociological text emerges from many traditions and is becoming more disciplined through narrative enquiry (Denzin, 2000). Stories can provide a means by which we represent a way of knowing and thinking (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Carter, 1993; Casey, 1993) and are useful in providing us with special access in understanding the learning and teaching processes. According to Polkinghorne (1995) & Clandinin & Connelly, (2000), people understand and explain their lives through stories and human experience.

Stories have the power to direct and change our lives (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.157) Several researchers’ attempts to survey the various conceptions of the term “story” explore the central theme of story as a “mode of knowing”; the political context of story and the issues of gender, power, ownership and voice that are captured in compelling ways by a narrative framework; examine the contributions of story to one’s understanding of case, as case study and as cases for informing and educating; assess the overall consequences of introducing story into our analytical and conceptual framework (Settelmaier & Taylor, 2002; Fine et al, 2000; Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

A story is a narrative with a certain very specific syntactic shape (beginning-middle-end, or situation-transformation-situation) and with a subject matter that allows for and encourages the projection of human values upon this material (McCormack, 2004; Mishler, 1999). Story is a distinct mode of knowing and explanation that captures in a special fashion the richness and nuances of meaning in human affairs and is characterised by an intrinsic multiplicity of meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Carter 1993). In this research, teachers’ voices and classroom practices are linked, both to the fundamental qualities of human experience and to the crucial questions of the communities of Rwandan society.

Analysis of Narrative

McCormack’s (2004) storying stories and Polkinghorne’s (1995) analysis of narrative have been used to interpret and analyse the narratives in this paper. The narratives have been interpreted using two perspectives: the socio-cultural and practical perspectives. The narratives were subjected to a process of constant comparative analysis whereby the narratives were read and reread and an interpretive commentary was provided at the end of each narrative in terms of the socio-cultural and practical perspectives. Perspectives form the context that nourishes the set of beliefs and assumptions and provide full and rich images of current states of affairs. The classroom is a social setting involving teachers and students.

The socio-cultural perspective is concerned with the relationships between the teacher and the students. From a socio-cultural perspective the teacher has to take into account the family background and the circumstances of the learners. According to Hargreaves, Earl & Schmidt (2002) the cultural perspective allows an investigation of how the teacher interprets the curriculum innovation and attempts to integrate it into the social and cultural contexts of schools. Change will affect teachers' beliefs as well as their practices, ideas, experiences and lives.

Four narratives are included about issues on which the teachers were most vocal: justice, gender, ethnic tensions, language and poverty. The narratives are written in a way so as to make teachers' voices and visions clearly heard.

Narrative 1: A Professional Development Exercise (Retrospectively written by the first author)

I planned this science professional development program with three co-ordinators from my school. I wanted the exercise to serve multiple purposes. I wanted my teachers to be empowered, to reach out to other schools in the community, to demonstrate how easy it is to conduct practical science in primary school and to impart some interactive learning strategies. The response to the session was tremendous. All the invited schools decided to send a team of five teachers. I had a planning session with my teachers. We decided on the experiments we could perform. I allowed my teachers to decide and asked them to select experiments that could be done with locally available material. I threw in a challenge, could we also show integration with interaction. My teachers responded to the challenge.

On the day of the professional development session my teachers had laid out four stations where hands-on activities would be carried out in small groups. Fifty teachers took part in the professional development exercise. One of the stations was germination and beans. I was amazed at the different variety of beans that are available and eaten in Rwanda. Teachers compared size, shape and colour, this in turn generated discussion on monocotyledons and dicotyledons. Making musical instruments from beans was also discussed. Another station was the health station. Five health issues that affect the lives of Rwandans were the focus of interest: cholera, HIV/AIDS, malaria, diarrhoea and malnourishment.

The teachers displayed a combination of traditional and scientific knowledge when they talked about oral rehydration solution that can be simply made with water, salt and sugar; the simple meals that can be made from locally available millet and milk to counteract malnourishment and the need to talk about protected sex and care for AIDS patients. The next station focussed on water and ways of water storage and purification. Using sand, alum and clean river pebbles my teachers' demonstrated purification of water. They discussed in a group how rainwater could be stored so that it does not run down the hillsides and is wasted. Water is such a precious commodity in Rwanda that this station generated a lot of discussion.

The final station was called from waste to wealth and here all local material was put to use. From banana fibre teachers made balls, boards and cards; from wood they made

statues and whistles; from hide they made drums; from metal strip they made cars, planes and bicycles and from gourds they made calabashes. The teachers realised that the knowledge they had was being used to teach recycling. At the end of the day, 50 tired but happy teachers received certificates and a handout containing notes of the days activities. They had used interactive strategies, integrated other subjects into science teaching and worked in groups. This was a one-off professional development experience for the teachers from the other schools.

Interpretive Commentary

This retrospective scenario highlights the need of teachers to upgrade and improve their qualifications and skills. During the course of two years in Rwanda, the first author had several professional development sessions with teachers. After each session it was clear that the teachers needed more than one-day sessions. They needed to upgrade from being diploma holders to degree holders and ought to have the means and facility for distance education or to study part time or in the evenings. In March 1998, a new, integrated teacher development program to upgrade 3500 unqualified teachers and 3000 under-qualified teachers commenced.

The first author had met the Director of pre-school, primary and special education in the Ministry of Education several times in Rwanda. During informal talks, he made a comment about the education reform process: At the beginning of 1995, the Ministry of Education and all its implementing partners put education on the agenda during a special conference on education policy and planning in order to establish the "what", "when", and "how" for the reconstruction of the education system in Rwanda. Priority was given to the creation of infrastructure, acquiring material resources and equipment and implementing emergency plans for teacher training at all levels. A special fund was created for children who were orphans of the genocide so that they would not be excluded from the school system. The 1998 Ministry of Education Report, while listing the problems and challenges faced by Rwanda, acknowledged that teachers who did not have sufficient level of general, vocational or pedagogical training caused a drop in the quality of the education system.

Narrative 2: The Story of a Rwandan Teacher (An autobiographical account of a Rwandan teacher, used with permission)

I am a qualified teacher and have a university degree. I have worked in Rwanda since 1988. This is my personal account of teaching and learning in the years between 1988 and 2000. Before 1988, I was a student at university, but used to work part-time. This was helpful for me, as I did not have a scholarship. Life was very hard and soon after I graduated in October 1988, I was told of the need for teachers at rural private schools in Rwanda.

As soon as I arrived at the school, the headmaster gave me the timetable without any interview or orientation. So great was the need that I was immediately hired as a fulltime teacher. The school had two sections: the mathematics and physics section and the pedagogy section that trained students to be primary teachers. On my first day itself I had contact with different classes.

During the school year, I sometimes had opportunities to discuss various teaching issues with colleagues. Although I was a new teacher, the teachers were friendly and welcomed and encouraged me. As the school was a rural school, the teachers and students expressed themselves in Kinyarwanda. I was the only teacher in the school who spoke English. Kinyarwanda was generally used to facilitate teaching and learning in all classrooms

Teachers did not talk and discuss about pedagogical issues. Many of the teachers were not qualified and were puzzled by such discussions. My school was a rural private one. There was no laboratory and not a single tool or equipment in spite of having the mathematics-physics section. The teachers managed to make as many drawings as possible on the black board but the teachers kept complaining that the quality of their work was affected by a lack of resources. This was the general case in most of the private schools, especially the rural private ones. Throughout the time I have been a teacher, I did not have the opportunity to attend a single seminar. The rural private schools were ignored and neglected. Even inspectors did not visit the schools. The head teachers usually trusted the teacher and would seldom visit the classes. The head teacher would sometimes ask the students if they understood what was taught and if they were happy with a teacher.

Although there were school curricula, there were not enough textbooks in the school. In many subjects there were no books at all. Very few schools had libraries, so the few books that the school had were usually kept in the school deputy's office. There was no order for maintaining the books and many books would disappear with teachers borrowing books and not returning them.

I always remember the agriculture subject scheduled in the classes. Every teacher was given some hours of agriculture so that students would grow a variety of crops and this would contribute food to the stock in the boarding section of the school. Each school also participated in 'Tree day'. The teachers went with the students to plant trees around the school, in the school compound and in the community. In addition to this, there was time allocated into the timetable when students could go and clean the school compound, the bathroom and the latrines. Even though schools were poorly resourced, teachers were regularly paid and the Rwandan franc was not as devalued as it is now and teachers were able to look after their needs and the needs of their family. The main problem was lack of medical facilities for the vast majority of the Rwandans. As medical services are not free in Rwanda, access to adequate and prompt healthcare is not common.

Unfortunately things began to change towards the end of 1990. Teachers started to work in more than one school to survive. At the start of the civil war in 1991 the country faced a terrible famine. The monthly salary did not help you to get food and teachers started taking loans. The situation was also very hard for the rural poor and villagers who were subsistence farmers. Most of the rural poor were women and children, young girls who had children. Many of the rural female secondary students had babies and this affected their studies. This period was extremely difficult for most Rwandese.

Then came the civil war and genocide, many teachers and students I personally knew perished in the genocide. I was in Rwanda during the genocide and what I witnessed is so horrible that I cannot find appropriate words to describe the tragedy. Seven months after the genocide, schools re-opened, students came back to school but most of the students and teachers had experienced trauma and grief and this affected their performance. There were many displaced children.

The education system in Rwanda has always been weak. The civil war and the subsequent genocide left the education system in ruins. Although action has been taken to rehabilitate the schools and implement a new curriculum, teacher salaries are still not paid on time, there are still no books in schools and there is an acute lack of resources. To conclude, as a teacher working in Rwanda, I feel that it is important to improve the living conditions of the family where the students come from. Teaching and learning will improve only when the living conditions of the teachers and students improve.

Interpretive Commentary

The first author has known Celestin, who has written this narrative, and has also visited his home. He lives in Kigali but his home is far from the centre and there is no access to water and sanitation. He has to buy water each day in jerry cans. He cannot meet the schooling needs of his five children and has often to borrow money at the start of the school year. This scenario is common to teachers and students in the whole of Kigali. This social reality has not improved in the eleven years after the genocide. Gradual impoverishment of teachers has increased, making their life more difficult and complex.

From a practical viewpoint, how are teachers to move from a chalk and talk approach to a learner centred approach and improve their skills for discussion and facilitation if their socio-economic situation does not improve? The poor socio-economic context of the teachers and learners is further exacerbated by the lack of school infrastructure, resources and lack of funds needed to improve conditions and sustain training.

Narrative 3: About a Teacher and a Parent (The first author's experience with HIV and Malaria)

I arrived in Rwanda in October 1997 and took up position as headmistress of a new private school. One of my responsibilities was to hire teachers, one of whom was a young Rwandan woman: I will call her Beatrice, she was one of the few teachers in the school with a degree in Education. She and her husband were well-qualified professionals. They had lived in Uganda as refugees before returning to Rwanda after the genocide. I appointed Beatrice as a primary teacher because she was aware of interactive strategies and child-centred teaching methodologies, having worked in a well-known private school in Kampala.

Beatrice was popular among her fellow teachers and was liked by the students. In early 1998, Beatrice began to experience frequent bouts of illnesses that included coughing, headaches, vomiting and diarrhoea and she lost a considerable amount of weight.

Beatrice continued to be ill frequently and eventually suspected that something was seriously wrong with her health.

Friends and colleagues advised her to have an HIV test but she did not go immediately for fear of finding out that she was seropositive. One day in mid-1999, Beatrice had a severe bout of coughing and was rushed to the hospital where she was diagnosed with tuberculosis; she also was tested for HIV and her results were positive. It takes courage and determination to face life when one has been diagnosed with an illness for which there is no known cure and which will be fatal. Nevertheless, Beatrice remained positive and continued coming to school. In the beginning, when she was not consistently bedridden and her physical strength varied, she came to school and taught. Eventually, Beatrice was too sick to come to school and had to be cared for at home. She passed away leaving two young children to be cared for by her husband.

I had experienced having teachers and students with AIDS in school whilst teaching in Uganda and Rwanda. Every experience was different and sad. In school, we had to develop a policy to attend to children after an accident in the school compound, so that teachers or the school nurse would not directly touch an open wound. Teachers learned how to support a colleague when he or she was diagnosed as having AIDS.

Included in this narrative is another incident about Asterie. Asterie was a dynamic mother of four children and the manager of a company. A supportive parent, she also became a friend in the years I was in Rwanda. Having a child in the school, she was a regular visitor to the school and represented a young successful woman: a mother and a professional. Whilst on a meeting overseas she was struck by malaria. In a few days, her brain was affected and Asterie died of cerebral malaria. I was deeply shocked and saddened by Asterie's death. Two successful and professional women are represented in this vignette. Beatrice and Asterie had access to medical help, but were affected by illnesses that proved to be fatal. What happens to the millions of Rwandans who are too poor and cannot afford medical help?

Interpretive Commentary

Malaria and HIV/AIDS are the major killer diseases in Rwanda. An estimated 11 percent of Rwandans (9 percent of men and almost 14 percent of women) are infected with HIV (UNAIDS, 2002). It is especially striking that the seroprevalence rate (11 %) is almost the same in rural as urban areas in Rwanda. One of the major problems in Rwandan community is that there is a high level of stigma around HIV/AIDS and a low level of support for those infected with the virus. Unfortunately, medical services are inadequate and many people cannot afford to pay for them. As a result, emphasis is on home-based care and creating associations for people living with HIV/AIDS with the objective of improving their conditions through the provision of material resources, moral support, education and income-generating activities (Kornfield, et al. 2002). On a daily basis teachers have to face, and work with, the reality that some of the children in the class and colleagues in the school may be HIV positive. During the wet season there is high absenteeism due to malaria. Head teachers have to be prepared for teachers coming down with malaria at any time. Because of these issues, learning about HIV/AIDS, malaria, cholera and diarrhoea is now part of the Rwandan secondary school science curriculum.

Teachers also are trained to be community counsellors and school students have performed dramas to increase community awareness about HIV/AIDS. People of all ages have attended seminars in their neighbourhoods. Students and adults are aware that HIV/AIDS can be transmitted through unprotected sexual intercourse, though fewer understand that HIV can also be transmitted from an infected mother to an unborn child, through contact with, or transfusion with, infected blood or through use of infected needles.

The high incidence of HIV among the rural and urban population of Rwanda affects the socio-cultural fabric of life in this transitional society, including teachers and students, as nearly every family has a relative affected by the disease that reduces life expectancy. From a practical perspective, schools learn to cope with having staff and students who are seropositive. Teachers learn to be supportive and sensitive of children who have lost family to the disease. Head teachers learn how to cope when teachers are absent due to illness and if they suddenly die.

Narrative 4: Jean Bosco (A narrative by a genocide survivor)

Jean Bosco was one of the youngest staff members in the school. The war broke out whilst Jean Bosco was a student of languages at the National University in Rwanda. His mother, father and sister hid in a church for shelter during the genocide. His father disappeared during this period and even after five years his mother grieves for her husband as she does not know what has happened to him.

Jean Bosco and his brother escaped from the *'interahamwe'* and his brother joined the rebel army only to be killed. Jean Bosco carries tremendous burdens for a young person and has the keen desire to study further. However, he cannot do so at this stage as his mother needs him, nor does he have the means. Jean Bosco was fluent in English, French and Kinyarwanda and taught at all primary levels. An extremely popular teacher, he was very approachable and a happy person despite the trauma he had experienced.

He and his mother, both teachers, continued teaching, often with little appreciation and acknowledgement from the Ministry of Education, and continued to serve the community in a time when many people focussed on their own personal interests. His mother, who is a government teacher, is often not paid on time and sometimes six months can elapse before she will be paid. The genocide did not make him bitter or angry and he continues teaching and hopes that the future will be better for the children of Rwanda:

“I hope that there will be more schools and tertiary institutions in Rwanda so that the children of Rwanda can benefit and continue their studies. It is important that children study. If they have qualifications then they are able to get a job, to look after themselves and their family.”

Jean Bosco dreams of, and works for, a stable and peaceful Rwanda in a time when he sees poverty on the rise in the country and its people facing extreme hardship.

“I would like to continue my studies and go back to university to become a lawyer. I feel I will then be able to help people who are innocent victims and also help the justice system so that we can always have peace.”

As a survivor of the genocide, Jean Bosco spoke as follows:

I would like to discuss how the genocide affected and shattered people's lives and how the people of Rwanda have come to survive and heal. I would like to explore and discuss local and national ethnic diversity. I would like to discuss what is wrong with Rwanda, and conflicts in other African states and why poor countries continue being at the mercy of external aid. I would like to discuss how peace, reconciliation and consensus could be achieved. I would like to let the students speak when necessary so that there is student dialogue.

Interpretive Commentary

In the aftermath of the genocide in 1994, teachers in Rwanda continued to be accountable in a time of difficulty, pain, grieving and trauma. Many teachers in Rwanda live at the lowest imaginable socio-economic level and do not have access to running water and electricity at home. The wage they earn is barely sufficient to meet the daily household needs of immediate and extended family. Jean Bosco endorses justice and hard work in a time when corruption is taking over Rwandan society. Further, he experiences tensions and feels guilty for failures that stem more from the educational and societal systems rather than from the teachers' own mistakes. The teachers are forced to endure extreme hardship and most have faced grief, pain and trauma yet they are resilient and show a tenacity to survive against great odds and rebuild the education system.

Implications of the Study

The complex nature of teachers' lives and practices became obvious because classroom practice in Rwanda is linked to the historical context. According to Thiessen (1993), the alternative path to understanding teachers, the professional path, recognises the above concerns. The professional path starts with the assumptions that some excellence already exists, that many teachers already have the capacity to create excellent classrooms and further solutions will come from working closely with more empowered teachers. In spite of the immense difficulties and constraints in Rwanda, the new curriculum documents give considerable hope for the future of education in Rwanda as is illustrated by the programme director of an international volunteer organisation that provided volunteer science teachers to Rwanda. She commented “the new curriculum should put education into context and must be progressive.” She further stated

“It is important that young Rwandans display a shared sense of the need for change. Change has to be brought about in the education system of Rwanda but this change has to fit reality. There is a need for huge manpower resources and skills in the education sector. Today, young Rwandans take to teaching as a last resort. It is important to put education into context, think about the out-of-school youth and the rural poor.”

The new curriculum has been a start, a way forward that signifies hope for the Ministry of Education, the teachers and students in Rwanda. The curriculum must be

examined for its appropriateness of the existing situation in Rwanda (McKenney, 2001). For a change to occur, the teachers and their students require opportunities for learning and teaching. The teachers' voices and classroom practices provide a portrayal of human and classroom experience in the transitional society of Rwanda. The challenge for the Ministry of Education in Rwanda lies in re-organising teacher training structures at the prefecture and commune levels, redefining science teacher training programmes, creating more pedagogical institutes, increasing the content knowledge of teachers and improving remuneration.

Transitional Rwandese society today cries out for better education for its children and youth, especially the poor and vulnerable ones, those at risk and those whose potential for a happy and productive life will all too often go desperately unrealised. The narratives in this study have also revealed hope: a powerful hope that rests on a mutual bond of the dedicated human agency (teachers and school administrators in this case) and the commitment of the leaders of Rwanda. The school that is the focus of this study, and where the first author worked from 1997 to 1999, is today a vibrant bilingual school (English and French) from Kindergarten to Year 12 with 1000 students that offers the Rwandan and the Cambridge University Yr 12 curriculum.

Conclusion and Transformation

The first author arrived in Rwanda in 1997, three years after the genocide. Having lived in neighbouring Uganda during the genocide, she knew of the atrocities, killings and the massive death. It took her a year after coming to Rwanda to have the courage to visit a mass gravesite where 40,000 were buried and a church building where more than 5,000 were killed. The inside of this church building has been left just as it was the day it was attacked. The grounds have been cleaned up and the bones of those who were killed outside have been stacked inside a shed adjoining the building. As she stood there looking at the rows and rows of bones and skulls she was humbled and overcome with a deep sense of shame and sadness. Shame that the world could not stop the atrocities and sadness that human beings could do this to other human beings.

Eleven years after the genocide, Rwanda continues to struggle to rebuild itself, heal the wounds caused by the genocide's aftermath and fulfil the basic rights of Rwandan men, women and children to healthcare, education and security. For the two years that the first author lived in Rwanda, she worked with teachers and students. She was struck by their resilience, simplicity, struggles, difficulties, hope and determination. This research has been a humble endeavour to highlight the voices of teachers and students in the transitional society of Rwanda as they struggle to achieve against great odds.

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