Decolonising inclusive education in lower income, Southern African educational contexts

Nithi Muthukrishna
School of Education, College of Humanities, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa
muthukri@ukzn.ac.za
Petra Engelbrecht
COMBER, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

The article proposes the need for the decolonising of the inclusive education movement in Southern African educational contexts. It draws on the authors' own research and reflexive engagement over the last five years on inclusive education policy formulation and implementation in selected Southern African contexts, namely, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Malawi. The article interrogates inclusive education policy enactment in the four country contexts through the lens of the theory of practice architectures, focusing mainly on the 'sayings' and 'performings.' The analysis highlights that discourses of inclusive education, which continue to be influenced by traditional special education ideologies from the global North and appropriated by the South have the power to undermine or subvert the inclusive education agenda in contexts shaped by neo-colonialism. The article argues for a critical inclusive education agenda located within social justice theory to enable the decolonising of inclusive education. The reflexive and ethical stance of a social justice framework has the power to identify, untangle and disrupt pervasive special education notions from the North, and challenge education administrators, school leaders at all levels and teachers to engage in ideological critique as they enact inclusive education policy and seek to address exclusion and oppression within the education system.

Keywords: African contexts; critical diversity literacy; decolonisation; inclusive education; practice architectures; social justice education

Introduction

Over the past decade or so, there have been global calls for the decolonisation of education in countries of the South (e.g. Higgs, 2012; Le Grange, 2016; Sayed, Motala & Hoffman, 2017). Decolonisation is a contested concept as former colonies have varied and diverse experiences of colonisation, thus producing different knowledge systems and multiple meanings within the decolonisation discourse. However, the key argument made is that decolonisation of education is a crucial movement to enable a shift from Western discourses about the nature of knowledge, knowing and meaning making. Hadebe (2017) explains that the decolonising agenda aims to critique, reformulate and re-envision power, knowledge and change. This would entail using a decolonisation lens to engage in critique of the sources of knowledge we are accessing and appropriating. Decoloniality is about acknowledging that knowledge is produced from a particular dominant space and that individuals think, know and act from a particular position. Hadebe (2017) further explains that coloniality as a concept expresses the perpetuation of colonialism in different forms, in former colonies post-independence. Coloniality is the pervasive often hidden power structure that maintains and entrenches relations of domination, exploitation and oppression long after direct colonialism has been disrupted.

In the context of decolonisation debates, inclusive education has been critiqued on the basis that it is viewed as a project located in coloniality, shaped by the hegemony of Western philosophies, forms of knowledge and discourses, and imposed upon countries of the Global South (e.g. Walton, 2018). The question this raises is: has the inclusive education agenda reproduced coloniality in countries of the South?

The discourse of inclusive education emerged from a predominantly resource-rich model of support provision in high-income countries for learners who have traditionally been marginalised within the educational mainstream and soon became an important item on the global educational development agenda (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn & Christensen, 2006; Kalyanpur, 2016). As has been documented extensively elsewhere (Engelbrecht & Artiles, 2016; Terzi, 2008; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013), it was at one time the practice to exclude from formal education any learner deemed to be 'different,' and in the majority of cases it specifically referred to those with a disability. Learners with any obvious disability were judged as having an individual deficit, and to be incapable of benefiting from education as it existed. Over a period of time a charity discourse emerged for people with disabilities that offered care and certain forms of education organised by religious or philanthropic bodies and subsequently expanded by various countries' systems of public education (Terzi, 2008). When governments, initially in high-income countries and later followed by middle and low-income countries did begin to take responsibility for the education of children with disabilities, it took the form of 'special education' for those with 'special educational needs' in separate education settings, such as special schools or separate classrooms in mainstream schools.

The historical legacy of separate special schools in higher-income countries was gradually challenged in high-income countries by moral concerns about segregated special education and its effectiveness. It was suggested that it might not be in the best interests of those with disabilities, or even of society as a whole, for

them to be separated from the mainstream leading, first of all, to notions of mainstreaming and integration, and since the late 1990s to inclusive education (Engelbrecht & Artiles, 2016; Terzi, 2008). The notion of 'inclusive education' was first advanced in the Nordic countries, which are amongst the most economically developed countries in Europe (Andriichuk, 2017), and in Canada (Walton, 2018). It must be noted that in these countries and other high-income countries of the global North, inclusive education emerged from highly resourced, funded and established special education systems.

Over the last two decades or so, inclusive education policy imperatives and practices have been transferred, largely by aid agencies and donor organisations, in most cases without question to lower-income countries. International standards, such as the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Education Needs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 1994) and the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, 2007), which are based on what is regarded as best practices that prevail in high-income countries, have become the guidelines for the implementation of inclusive education in a second cohort of countries, largely more developing, lower-income countries (Grech, 2011; Srivastava, De Boer & Pijl, 2013). Conceptualisations and understandings of inclusive education therefore reflect the export of thinking based on the development of inclusive education in high-income countries, where adequate funding as well as highly qualified professional support structures are freely available. The power dynamics in the policy process in low-income countries are evident in the exclusion of culturally relevant knowledge, social histories, economic realities, indigenous knowledges, contextual priorities, and local expertise.

Despite the general emphasis on inclusivity and the creation of accepting inclusive school communities, widely held medical-deficit assumptions about the nature and distribution of abilities are embedded in the thinking of those in high-income countries (Florian, 2014). These assumptions that have their roots in traditional special education have been found to impact the inclusive education agenda in low-income countries (e.g. Naicker, 2018). Furthermore, in many instances, the international rhetoric of inclusive education has been followed without attention to other identity markers of marginalisation in education (e.g., social class, race, ethnicity, gender, religion and home language). It also needs to be noted that in many lower income countries the daily challenge in education is not only to address exclusionary practices, but to enable learners to access mainstream schools in general, gain access to

adequate human and technical resources and improve low literacy rates (Grech, 2011; Kalyanpur, 2016; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014). For these reasons, there have been calls from researchers for the acknowledgement of the need to reconstruct inclusive education in unique cultural-historical contexts (e.g. Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014).

The case has repeatedly been made (e.g. Grech, 2011; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014) that the seemingly visionary international views of inclusive education are underpinned by assumptions that inclusive education requires to be implemented in the same way across national contexts. Such an approach is disempowering and has proven itself to be so in many lower-income countries. Role players are striving to achieve goals and markers for success that are framed by international rhetoric and conventions. The significance of culturally shaped values, beliefs, knowledge and emotions in interpreting and developing inclusive schools and communities in a lower-income country are not always acknowledged. There has been an increasingly critical response to paternalistic approaches to the development of inclusive education policy and practice in lower-income countries. An increasingly vocal argument is being heard that there is an urgent need for contextual and situated constructions of inclusive education that draw on the strengths and capabilities of local communities (Armstrong, 2005; Singal & Muthukrishna, 2014; Thomas, 2013; Walton, 2016). This would be a significant goal in the imperative to decolonise inclusive education.

Like most lower-income countries, countries in Southern Africa with specific reference to Malawi, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa look back on a history of colonisation. Legacies of colonisation – and in the case of South Africa, apartheid as well – are characterised as stated by Grech (2011), by stratification structures and processes that perpetuate the belief in the division of people into privileged and disadvantaged groups. Due to many factors, these beliefs about the privileged and the disadvantaged continue to be entrenched in societies, even in those societies where education policies on inclusive education are now underpinned by notions of human rights (Grech, 2011). The decolonising project has to challenge such pervasive beliefs. The ongoing implications of colonial, re-colonial and post-colonial relations for knowledge processes and conditions for education ought therefore be taken into account in the development of an understanding of multiple forms of disadvantage as well as diversity (Asabere-Ameyaw, Anamuah-Mensah, Dei & Raheem, 2014; Tikly, 2011).

At the heart of decolonising inclusive education, there ought to be the recognition by

various actors that dominant understandings of inclusive education are conceptualised, mainly by researchers in high-income countries. A failure to acknowledge local wealth of knowledge can distort the realities of decolonising the macro-structural and political conditions in society that impact on the development of inclusive education (Phasha, Mahlo & Dei, 2017). Themes that are emerging from recent calls to decolonise inclusive education in South Africa include, for example, reclaiming culture, knowledge, history, and the identities of learners by reflecting on past histories and experiences, and utilising locally situated cultural knowledge in developing contextually relevant knowledge production in inclusive education (Phasha et al., 2017; Walton, 2016). An ongoing and critical engagement with the legacies of colonialism and apartheid with specific reference to conceptions of inclusive education is needed if alternative locally relevant solutions to the oppression of exclusion are to be found.

In this article, against the above background, we draw from our own research and reflexive engagement over the last five years on inclusive education policy formulation and implementation that has occurred in various southern African contexts e.g., Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Malawi. This article firstly, provides a historical analysis of inclusive education as an agenda in lower income countries, arguing that dominant Western ideologies and practices are entrenched. Secondly, it provides a research-based account of the complexities in inclusive education policy implementation, and finally; and argues for the need to de-colonise the inclusive education agenda, and for a critical inclusive education that has a social justice, anti-oppression orientation. The key research questions therefore are: to what extent is inclusive education policy implementation in the four country contexts shaped and produced by a coloniality agenda? How can the inclusive education agenda be de-colonised through a social justice, anti-oppression orientation?

Research Methodology

The overall method used in this article involved a three-step linear process to do a systematic review, against the background of the current debates in countries of the South, on post-colonialism and de-colonising education, with a specific emphasis on its role in the implementation of inclusive education (Engelbrecht & Ekins, 2017; Ryan, 2010; Seedat, 2018). First, we reviewed current literature in this regard by using online databases (e.g. EBSCOhost, Google and Education Resources Information Center [ERIC]). This more general review was followed by a more refined review of the role of colonisation in shaping inclusive education in four post-colonial Southern African

countries, where we were involved for a number of years in specific research projects.

The qualitative case studies we were involved with and which we reviewed again for the purpose of this article are documented in detail in research reports, namely MIET Africa (2014); Muthukrishna, Morojele, Naidoo and D'amant (2016); Werning, Artiles, Engelbrecht, Hummel, Caballeros and Rothe (2016). Broadly, research in these projects sought to understand how schools engaged in the process of creating inclusive, democratic policies, enabling structures, cultures, and pedagogies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Further, how context shaped inclusive education policy enactment was a key issue examined. The research studies were undertaken in a range of primary and secondary schools located in both rural, urban and peri-urban areas within the four country contexts. Research participants were teachers, school principals, and key members of school management. Primary data in the studies was gathered from key informants through individual semi-structured interviews, focus group interviews, informal observations of the school environment and culture, classroom observations. Secondary data included available demographic information; school policies; minutes of meetings; and various other policy texts such the school mission statement; learner books; lesson plans; and photographs of events. In-depth information on the research design and design choices are presented in the research reports cited in this article.

In our final step, we used the theory of practice architectures as a critical analysis framework within a decolonising lens to interrogate inclusive education enactments in these countries as it manifested in the research projects in which we were involved.

Interrogating Tensions in Inclusive Education Practice

We draw on evidence from our collaborative research to critique the 'sayings' and 'performings' or 'doings' of inclusive education drawing from the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Mahon, Kemmis, Francisco & Lloyd, 2017). Schatzki (2010:51) describes a social practice as "an open, organized [*sic*] array of doings and sayings." This theory foregrounds practice and its enactments as inherently contextual, situated, social and local in nature. Further, the overlapping and interconnected dimensions of 'sayings' and 'performings' happen within particular 'site ontologies' that may enhance, hinder or limit inclusive education enactments (Mahon et al., 2017). We explore some of the tensions in inclusive education policy implementation and practices in four African country contexts, through a decolonisation lens.

The Sayings of Inclusive Education (IE)

The 'sayings' or semantic space of inclusive education refers to 'thinkings,' understandings and meaning-making in the medium of language. It is about expressions, concepts, and metaphors that describe what is happening in practice. Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2015) explain that in everyday work in schools and classrooms, individuals interact with one another inter-subjectively in the semantic space. These scholars argue that it is useful to examine "dispositions and knowledges which give rise to different kinds of actions and judgements" (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015:150). More importantly, ideologies that guide policy action and policy thinking are embedded in language and meaning.

Our research in the four country contexts shows that the meanings and conceptions of IE are disparate, and reflect often-conflicting ideologies depending upon what discourses, contextual dynamics and language games shape particular enactments. In all four country contexts, the semantic spaces analysed across the educational sites reflected the use of exclusionary concepts or pervasive labels such as '*slow learners*,' the notions of a '*special class*' and '*special class teacher*,' '*learners with special needs*,' '*learners with learning barriers*' (LLBs), '*learners with learning difficulties*'; '*remedial learners*,' '*learners with diverse needs*,' '*normal vs. disabled learners*,' '*learners with psychological barriers*' indicating that dominant 'special education' ideologies and pathological discourses continue to operate. The evolution of such concepts and meanings is located in the histories of the four countries shaped by colonialism. The critical issue is that they serve to entrench negative constructions of children who may require social and academic support that is different from the norm. Walton (2016) explains that this kind of language has the power to 'other' certain learners, and reproduce social inequalities.

In Malawi, the school population is characterised by high levels of diversity that include not only socio-economic differences but also home language and ethnic as well as age and gender-related differences (Chimombo, 2009; Hummel & Engelbrecht, 2018). There is an increasing awareness of diversity within classrooms in school communities that is reflected in general understandings of inclusive education, for example,

> *Inclusive education is the kind of education in which we mix learners, such as the physically challenged, those children who head households, those from poor families, those with hearing impairments and those with visual impairments* (Member of School Management Committee, School B) (Rothe, Charlie & Moyo, 2016).

However, an analysis of classroom practices in the four case study schools in Malawi indicate that teachers as well as school principals still tend to focus on learners with identifiable forms of disabilities in their definitions of inclusive education. The normative assumptions of the traditional deficit approach still shape and drive the way in which inclusive education is conceptualised by the majority of participants in the four case study schools (Hummel, Engelbrecht & Werning, 2016).

In Botswana, views of inclusion were often contradictory and reflected competing discourses. There were certain teachers who espoused a view of inclusion as quality education for all irrespective of diversity. Some teachers expressed the notion of '*full inclusion*' and '*partial inclusion*' – clearly meanings appropriated from the global North, stating that they supported partial inclusion in view of inadequate support mechanisms within the education system. Many teachers were of the view that inclusion was about learners with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. There were teachers who indicated strongly that they were opposed to the inclusion of all learners with disabilities in their schools, as they did not have the pedagogical skills to provide quality education to them.

The notion of full inclusion and partial inclusion suggests a pathological gaze and deficit view of difference. Without doubt, learners would have to be subjected to some form of assessment, sorting, categorisation and labelling in the decision-making process. Ideologies and assumptions from traditional special education would inform the process. The exclusion and pervasive 'othering' of particular learners would be endemic to such processes. This raises questions of power: who should decide what version of inclusion is implemented in a school; in whose interests is inclusion full or partial; and would certain learners continue to be rendered the 'Other'? Are there accountability mechanisms in place as the process is enacted? Decoloniality has to begin with the recognition of these power dynamics within the semantic spaces of inclusive education.

We argue that the semantic space is central to a rights-based, socially just inclusive education agenda. Educational administrators, school leaders and teachers need to be aware that language has the power to entrench meanings that exclude and oppress certain learners. The language of inclusive education appropriated by teachers in the four contexts is creating dilemmas for inclusive education practice, in that it cannot free itself from the ideological grasp of the dominant special educational discourse. In other words, traditional special education continues to usurp the discourse of inclusive education. The questions that emerge are: how do we resist and disrupt the language and meanings of traditional Western special education in inclusive education policy implementation? Our research suggests that most teachers in the country case studies have an un-reflexive ideological orientation towards hegemonic special education

notions and understandings, in particular the pervasive labelling of learners. Our view is that fundamental assumptions and thinking about difference need to be interrogated.

The 'Performings' of Inclusive Education
The 'performing' or 'doing' spaces are where shared activity and actions happen. The 'doing' spaces relate to the economic-material arrangements of practice, such as access to resources, and the physical structures in the context. These arrangements may enhance or hinder practice (Mahon et al., 2017). In this section, we examine some of the 'doings' of inclusive education practice and how context shapes them.

In all four country contexts, there was a strong focus on accommodating individual support needs, for example, meeting the needs of individual 'learners who experience barriers to learning,' and 'helping learners catch up.' In Malawi, South Africa and Namibia, there exist 'remedial classes,' 'transition classes,' 'resource rooms,' and 'special classes' set up for 'failures,' learners with 'learning difficulties' and learners with limited English Language proficiency. In South Africa the establishment of remedial units as well as separate "special classes" for learners with learning difficulties, specifically in the context at the full-service school, may be viewed as a contradiction. The original purpose of these schools as outlined in relevant policy documents was to develop inclusive systems and to become examples of good practice in fully inclusive classrooms (Department of Education, 2001). Traditional special education structures operate in the context of inclusive education innovation, reproducing the very exclusionary practices that the full-service school is intended to be addressing. The task of decolonising would be to address the uncritical, Eurocentric categorisation and labelling of learners on the basis of particular deficit-oriented identity markers and the relegation of certain learners to separate facilities; and in so doing, the perpetuation of unequal social relations. Further, creative local responses to the support needs of learners underpinned by the inclusive principles of social justice and equity are necessary. The full-service schools are considered an innovative structure proposed in the key inclusive education policy, Education White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001), but research indicates that a lack of clear implementation goals as well as adequate human, material and financial resource allocation has created a gap between idealistic policy pronouncements and its implementation in South Africa (Engelbrecht, Nel, Smit & Van Deventer, 2016).

In Malawi there was a strong emphasis placed by district officials in wider school district levels on access to education for all (Rothe et al., 2016), for example, '*We make sure that even education is also within the rights of the child, for example that every child regardless of sex, background, is able to access education like everybody else*' (District School Welfare Officer), but our research suggests that realising these goals within schools is challenging and complex. The majority of teachers indicated that enacting inclusive education in their classrooms has meant that they should include children with disabilities. However, our findings revealed that financially, where at all possible, separate education provision is provided in resource rooms and teaching and learning support provided by special education teachers (Hummel et al., 2016). It can be seen here that coloniality continues to promote, sustain and entrench dominant special education agendas to shape enactments of inclusive education.

We need to highlight that many of the practices in the four country contexts reflect some degree of agency on the part of school management and teachers in their efforts to respond to the inclusive education policy imperatives. These enactments, though exclusionary, must be seen in the context of inadequate professional development; inadequate human, material and financial resources; and other contextual realities, such as large class size. Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011) explain that as actors of policy, teachers do display agency as they try to interpret and adjust policy imperatives to align with their fluid understandings and beliefs, and to meet the challenges they face in situated contexts. Further to this, the case studies revealed that there are systemic, contextual conditions in schools that produce exclusion, and militate against the inclusive educational agenda. However, the danger of 'marking' certain groups of learners as different, reproducing oppression and reinforcing unequal power dynamics does exist in particular responses to diversity. This approach is, for example, in the case of Malawi, strengthened by the role of international donor organisations that focus on the development of support for children with specific disabilities (Hummel, Rothe, Charlie, Moyo, Werning & Engelbrecht, 2018). In the above initiatives, access is about striving to accommodate learners who deviate from the norm, and not so much about the right of all learners to quality education. Further, inclusive education policy is promoted in a technical, assimilationist manner, clearly influenced by dominant special education ideologies.

Although school management and teachers alluded to the gap between policy agendas and practical realities in schools as well as a lack of political will by ministries of education and government, they were rather silent about systemic conditions in the education system, schools and communities that mitigate against inclusion. For

example, achievement outcomes in the regular schools are still a critical concern, particularly in South Africa and Namibia. Socioeconomic inequalities shape education provision and are a major impediment to the development of well-resourced schools that can provide quality education for every learner. In Malawi, however, school principals in the case study schools did emphasise, for example, that many school buildings, classrooms and sanitary provisions are dilapidated and not suitable for effective learning and teaching purposes. Additionally, learning materials and technical equipment are scarce, and overall a lack of resources has led to overcrowded classrooms and teachers face large student cohorts (Hummel & Engelbrecht, 2018).

The picture that emerges is that inclusive education enactments in the schooling contexts of the four countries are within untransformed educational systems impacted by systemic socio-political influences. In South Africa, for example, the nature of teacher professional development programmes has historically received criticism. Some of the reasons are questionable quality, inequality, fragmentation, poor use of resources and lack of relevance (Kamanga, 2013). At one of the Namibian schools as well as in at least two schools in Malawi, school leaders indicated that poverty was a significant factor associated with school dropout. Addressing systemic oppression such as social inequality has to be a central to the project of decolonising inclusive education in lower income countries. Radical reconstruction of education systems is necessary to achieve the goal of quality education for all learners. Further, confronting the hegemonic neoliberal globalising agenda that entrenches poverty and inequality in most lower income contexts has to be a key imperative of a decolonising project.

The conflicting identities of teachers was an interesting facet that emerged in our study. On the one hand, there were certain enactments that suggested an unreflexive ideological orientation towards hegemonic special education discourses, for example, in the pervasive categorisation and labelling of learners, On the other hand, a remarkable finding was some heartening evidence of school leaders and teachers engaging as social actors, displaying agency and a reflexive stance in addressing contextual barriers to inclusion. The schools are committed to providing access to all children in the community, and to ensure that they remain in school, for example, children in poverty, children with disabilities, teen mothers, and children from previously marginalised communities in the case of Namibia. In the South African case study, one of the primary schools has a successful income generation and poverty alleviation project in partnership with farmers in the

area. A member of the School Based Support Team of teachers explained how the project began,

> We suspected that there is something behind the children in classes - so then we started doing the research, calling the parents, asking the parents the history of the child so that maybe they can tell us, maybe he has got some problems during the class. Then we found that at home, there is no one working. They are starving, when the child is starving the school has to take part in that. So you can see we started the vegetables just to assist those families so that we give them something to eat and the nutrition as well. We do this to be sure that the child eats enough so that they can concentrate in school.

Similarly, despite inadequate funding, the School-Based Support Team at the full-service school is reaching out to the other schools in the area and the community. An innovative event was held with the support of the business sector, referred to as "Grandmothers' Day." The school made the decision to affirm grandmothers who were the primary caregivers of orphans and vulnerable children in the school's community, including children with disabilities and those affected and infected by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS).

In Malawi in recent years, schools have developed strategies to increase collaboration with local communities for support in addressing challenges to access to education for all children. A remarkable achievement has been the initiative to improve access to education for girls who have been traditionally marginalised in formal education. Mothers as well as fathers in the four school communities in our research study have, for example, formed support groups for girls. These groups are playing a major role in intervening where girls drop out of school due to pregnancies, and supporting the readmission of these teen mothers to schools (Hummel & Engelbrecht, 2018).

In the context of these local initiatives, it is important to understand that inclusive education is about the collective rather than the individual. Exclusion and social inequality is a collective experience that demands collective agency to resist and disrupt. Inclusion is also about innovative ways of accessing resources to enable participation in school, and about engaging communities. Letseka (2000) emphasises the importance of communality to traditional African life, where belonging to a community of people is central, and so are values, such as empathy, compassion, reciprocity and solidarity. This contrasts with the Western liberal idea of the individual. Miles, Lene and Merumeru (2014) undertook an analysis of inclusive education in the Pacific region. Based on their evidence, the researchers highlight the importance of a locally situated inclusive education approach that draws on

the strengths and capabilities of indigenous communities. Singal and Muthukrishna (2014:7) have argued that inclusive education is a "cultural product that has unique and specific configurations depending on its spatial and temporal contexts." A project committed to decolonising inclusive education would draw on such local, cultural and indigenous strengths and capabilities.

It is significant that at times, teachers as well as parents adopt alternate identities and a reflexive stance as they respond to the social realties and imperatives in their context. In these enactments they are able to unshackle themselves from the dominant pervasive discourses and engage in innovations in response to pressing contextual realties such as poverty. These enactments without doubt reflect an understanding of inclusive education as a critical, ethical and socially just agenda. The question this raises is: how can a decolonising project enhance the reflexive stance of teachers and education leaders at all levels to enable them to question oppression systems and structures; engage with questions of power; and enhance their capacity to act as agents to address oppression and injustice, and emerge with innovative local, indigenous responses to inclusion.

Towards a Critical Inclusive Education
As discussed in the previous sections, inclusive education in the four countries has been shaped by and produced by coloniality agendas. Emerging debates in Southern Africa about how to de-colonise inclusive education stress the importance of acknowledging local philosophical under-standings, beliefs and practices and tapping into rich local cultural resources (Dart, Khudu-Petersen & Mukhopadhyay, 2018; Phasha et al., 2017). The emphasis placed by Dart et al. on the development of Africanist understandings of expressions of mutual respect based on social harmony (*kagisano*) and common humanity (*botho*) in the implementation of inclusive education in Botswana is also highlighted by Phasha et al. (2017) and Walton (2018). They foreground *ubuntu* as a concept encompassing humaneness, compassion, a sense of caring for one another's wellbeing, and its recognition of rights and the responsibilities of every member of society in fostering individual and societal well-being. These scholars argue that these cultural values and beliefs have significance within an agenda aimed at de-colonising inclusive education in South Africa. However, it ought to be noted that these researchers also highlight that including complex traditional cultural philosophies uncritically without acknowledging their context-dependent nature could be counter-productive. For example, Walton (2018) and other African researchers (e.g. Baffoe, 2013; Mfoafo-M'Carthy & Sossou, 2017) have drawn attention to narratives of exclusion and oppression of individuals with

disabilities documented in research in many African contexts, clearly incompatible with the notions of humanness as expressed in the concepts *botho/ubuntu* (Dart et al., 2018; Walton, 2018).

The question remains about how and in what ways can the inclusive education agenda be decolonised. Walton (2018), however, puts forward the alternate view that rather than focus on decolonising inclusive education, the emphasis should be on harnessing the principles and im-peratives of inclusive education to resist and disrupt the coloniality agenda. Our view is that a strong social justice framing for de-colonising inclusive education is essential to disrupt exclusion, structural disadvantage, and the cycles of oppression that play out in education systems, schools and their communities, and to reclaim and reimagine *ubuntu*.

Our contention is that it is critical that a decolonising agenda interrogates the ideologies that shape inclusive education policy implementation in the education system. The questions to engage with are: what are locally embedded meaning, values and beliefs that shape inclusive education enactments? How do ideologies held by actors in-fluence the practice architectures in particular contexts, that is: the sayings, performings and relatings (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008)? Are the beliefs and values that teachers hold and practices they initiate located within a human rights and social justice agenda? We stress that merely holding African values of humanness, compassion and caring may lead to enactments of paternalistic inclusive education and practices that fail to disrupt exclusion and oppression. We argue that teachers and other actors need to be equipped with the tools to identify, analyse, and evaluate the ethical and social implications of the ideologies that guide their inclusive education practices and enactments. Critical scholars like Roger Slee and Julie Allan acknowledge that inclusive education is an ideology, and that inclusive education practices are deeply ideological in nature (Allan, 2013; Allan & Slee, 2008).

Allan (2013:1242) explains that ideologies are "systems of representation which unconsciously mediate people's understanding of the world." She argues that particular ideologies have the power to authenticate particular knowledge forms and dis-courses, and to silence others. Further, ideological critique is a significant instrument to uncover, deconstruct, disrupt and resist dominant discourses and practices that often go unchallenged, such as the pervasive ways in which dominant special education discourses from the North infiltrate inclusive education practices in African contexts. A further example is that context is ignored when these dominant discourses shape so-called innovative actions such as the establishment of resource units and remedial classes that are

unsustainable. In our study, the schools neglect to expose critical sites of struggle, that is, spaces in which the social, political, and educational systems create and maintain marginalisation, inequalities and exclusions. Their 'innovative' actions are effected in an education system and social context that is uncontested and untransformed. Walton (2016) stresses that inclusion needs to be seen as radical reform in the entire education system. This goal would have to be fundamental to the decolonising inclusive education agenda.

Based on our research findings in the four countries, we contend that first and foremost, to decolonise inclusive education in African contexts, there is a need for a rigorous framework for critiquing ideology and the practices they shape. In addition, the decolonising project would focus on building the competences of education leaders at all levels, as well as teachers, to analyse the ethical and social implications of dominant ideologies that play out in the context of inclusive education policy implementation. We argue that a social justice education framework has the potential to build teachers' competences to engage in ideological critique of inclusive education policy, their identities, and their own practices and that of others (Adams, Bell, Goodman & Joshi, 2016). The decolonising work would be to enable all actors to constantly interrogate, question and challenge their own positionalities and how particular values, cultural beliefs, understandings and practices have the power to limit or advance the rights based inclusion agenda. A social justice lens enables a reflexive and transgressive stance towards inequalities, oppression, and exclusion (Bell, 2016).

Bell (2016:4) explains that "the goal for social justice education is to enable people to develop the critical analytical tools necessary to understand the structural features of oppression and their own socialisation within oppressive systems." She draws attention to other key issues. Social justice education seeks to develop an awareness, knowledge and competences in individuals to examine issues of social justice and injustice in their own personal spaces, institutions, communities, and in society in general. It also builds agency and reflexivity in individuals to disrupt and change oppressive and exclusionary behaviours, actions and beliefs at personal, individual, institutional, cultural and societal levels. We believe that a social justice framework will equip teachers with knowledge, skills and processes to evaluate inclusive education policies and practise, contest dominant discourses, and to engage confidently in developing local, situated responses to creating inclusive schools and communities. This kind of transformation and change is crucial to the decolonising project.

A key principle of social justice education is a critical consciousness about oppressive social conditions – a tenet that stems from the work of Paulo Freire (1997). In the context of inclusion and exclusion this means having a critical awareness about one's own and others' attitudes, beliefs, values, and worldviews towards difference, and how power and privilege can operate to oppress, marginalise, and 'other.'

Based on our research, we argue that unexamined ideologies, beliefs and values may be a hindrance to the creation of inclusive schools and their communities. Most teachers and school leaders in our case studies were unaware of their own complicity in perpetuating exclusionary and oppressive educational practices under the guise of inclusion. Teacher professional development initiatives that focus on inclusive education could be enhanced from the infusion into the programmes of a social justice education framing to enable the reflexive examination of dominant discourses, values, beliefs and actions that perpetuate exclusion and oppression.

Melissa Steyn has developed the framework of Critical Diversity Literacy (CDL) to analyse power and privilege related to multiple forms of difference, for example, race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, language, and (dis)-ability among others. She argues that power creates systems of privilege, advantage, disadvantage and oppression (Steyn, 2015). CDL also referred to as 'reading practice,' builds teachers' competence in identifying and examining operations of power and oppression in schooling contexts. CDL provides a set of analytic skills that could enable teachers to identify, think about in reflexive ways, and act to disrupt social oppression and pervasive dominant discourses (Reygan & Steyn, 2017). Such skills are vitally important to the pursuit of decolonising inclusive education.

One of these analytic skills relates to teachers seeing themselves as agents of social change in the goal to make certain schools are safe, caring, inclusive and non-discriminatory contexts. Power, oppression and marginalisation are processes that operate in all facets of creating inclusive schools and communities, including the development of an inclusive school culture; creating an inclusive curriculum and inclusive pedagogies; creating safe, health promoting schools; community partnerships; indigenising education; ensuring educational access for all and achieving the goal of quality learning outcomes for all learners. Social justice questions that arise from Melissa Steyn's work are reflexive and crucial when engaging with the various dimensions of the decolonisation of inclusive education. Some examples are: how do we respond to difference; is the school's ethos and culture creating centres and margins, and privilege and disadvantage; do certain school structures perpetuate oppression and exclusion; are school leaders and teachers complicit in perpetuating

oppression and marginalisation; and are they complacent in the face of exclusions, inequity and social injustice?

Note
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