

**““A Well-Founded fear’:  
Children’s literature about  
refugees and its role in the  
primary classroom”**

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## **Declaration**

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

Signed:

Dated:

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous help and assistance that I have received from various people during the course of this work, without whom it would not have come to fruition.

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## Abbreviations

CDP	Continuing Professional Development
CLPE	Centre for Literacy in Primary Education
EMAG	Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant
EMAS	Ethnic Minority Achievement Strategy
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
INSET	In-service Training
LA	Local Authority
NLS	National Literacy Strategy
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PSE	Personal, Social and Emotional Education
PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education
PSHE	Personal, Social and Health Education

## Quotations

*“Refugees are really like us. And I used to not know what they were, I thought they were bad people but I have learned that they are innocent people looking for a home in safety”* (Year 6 child, quoted in King, 2003:13).

*“I hope to take my readers into narratives and on journeys which will involve them in asking questions and challenging injustice, at least mentally, through being absorbed in a story”* (Naidoo, 1992: 17).

*“Generally speaking, children’s literature has low status and is rarely deemed worthy of serious study. Yet it should, for it has a lot to teach us”* (Sokoloff, 2005: 176).

## Abstract

This study begins by identifying a new genre in writing for young people which has developed rapidly since the millennium, namely that of children's literature about refugees. It questions whether these books have a role to play in understanding and validating the circumstances of refugees in the primary classroom. Taking as my starting point the UNHCR definition of a refugee as one who has a "well-founded fear" of persecution (1951), I consider the consequences of this position for children and its depiction in two commonly used books in primary schools: Mary Hoffman's *The Colour of Home* (2002) and Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* (2000). Making a vertical case study of each book, through an author/ teacher/ child trajectory, I trace the motivations and aims of the two writers, how the books are mediated by teachers in the primary classroom, and how refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to them.

Using a variety of qualitative methods, I present data suggesting that pupils in five classes gained valuable insight into a complicated and controversial issue. However viewing children through a refugee/non-refugee binary was reductive, not recognising the multi-layered nuances of meaning which were constructed at all ages. Furthermore, while the primary curriculum in England does not promote reading for socio-political understanding, but focuses on literacy rather than literature goals, teachers played a powerful role in mediating the texts when sharing them in the classroom, and devised a selection of stimulating resources to aid with planning for reader response and some "critical literacy". I also conclude that, as the genre becomes ever more popular with authors, writers need to engage in robust research, give "voice to the voiceless", and have a responsibility to their readers to present positive images of refugees' resilience.

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# Introduction

## 0.1 *Autobiographical reflections*

*“Other people’s sorrows and joys have a way of reminding us of our own; we partly empathize with them because we ask ourselves: What about me? What does that say about my life, my pains, my anguish?”*  
(Nafisi, 2004, p. 325)

Compared to some of the participants in my research study, my life has contained very few pains and very little anguish and yet I have developed a passionate interest in the refugee experience, from a relatively comfortable, white middle class background, with no family links to different cultures and no history of migration. This autobiographical chapter, then, attempts to trace the threads that have combined to form the impetus for this study, and starts by suggesting that one of the strongest motivating forces for me has been the experience of being the political “outsider” from a very early age. I grew up in a radical family, living in a mono-cultural, bourgeois and conservative area and therefore doomed until the age of 18 to feel different: a left-wing fish in very blue water. This position was coupled with a strong sense of social justice, developed within me by my parents from the outset. Together, these strands contributed to a desire, through my early teaching career, to reach out to children in difficult circumstances, who might feel they have a history that they cannot readily share, although I am keenly aware that my experience differs widely from theirs in many respects.

### 0.1.1 **A passion for literature**

As a child, I was an avid reader of children’s books, and having no brothers or sisters, the characters became like friends to me. Anne, of “Anne of Green Gables”, and Jo from “Little Women” were my particular favourites – both girls with a passion for literature, who did not fit the conventional mould, interestingly enough. Although in the 1960s and early 1970s, the field of children’s books was relatively small, I had the whole literary “canon” on my bookshelf: “Winnie the Pooh”, Beatrix Potter’s animal stories, the Narnia series, “The Hobbit”, “Alice in Wonderland”, “Black Beauty”, “The Secret

Garden” etc. - I read them all. I was particularly fond of historical novels, enjoying the insight that literature could give into other times and ways of living. When I did finally make the leap into adult terrain, my particular taste was for the “classic realist” texts (discussed later) of Jane Austen, the Brontës, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and D. H. Lawrence.

For my degree I decided to read English Literature at Sussex University, which was supposed to be at the cutting edge of literary theory at the time. To my dismay, the classic texts I had enjoyed prior to my arrival were “out” – disparaged as bourgeois constructs, which merely maintained elitism. Marxist Structuralism was the order of the day, with tutors such as Homi Bhabha, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (referred to later) questioning the dominant perspectives and developing their own critiques, key concepts and schools of thought (see Chapter 3). Some of these tutors pushed the discipline of English Literature to the furthest reach of the definition, running courses entitled, for example, “Television and Ideology”. Although I did not realise it at the time, these courses were an early precursor to the development of Cultural Studies as a school of thought or specialism in its own right.

However there was little, if any, post-colonial analysis in my degree. For example in studying Conrad’s (1902) *Heart of Darkness* there was no debate about the image of Africa and Africans portrayed in the book. It was 1978, and ironically only three years earlier Chinua Achebe had delivered his blistering attack on Conrad’s image of Africa in a speech at the University of Massachusetts (Achebe, 1977), accusing him (justifiably in my mind) of the basest racism, that no amount of literary merit could redeem. Had I been made aware of these fundamental rumblings against the canon, I would have entered into my studies with far greater enthusiasm for a developing school of thought which I would have relished. Nevertheless, always with a thirst for engagement with the politics of literature, I wrote for my final dissertation about modern political drama (at the time the late 1970s was modern), finding an interweaving of politics, modern history and literature highly stimulating and relevant to what I wanted to know of the world.

### **0.1.2 Global links**

My family had what I would now identify as a global outlook. International politics were frequently discussed, and, growing up in the 1960s and 1970s the Cold War and nuclear arms proliferation presented a constant fear. I left university with a strong desire to experience other countries and went to teach English in a Secondary School in the newly independent Zimbabwe, travelling extensively in Africa during my two and a half years spent there. This gave me a chance to experience different cultures than my own, and to witness at first hand the struggles met by children in less economically developed countries. I set up a school library and realised how, in such poverty, with so little to stimulate the mind and entertain, a book is a precious commodity, and a valued antidote to boredom. It struck me at the time that through books the students could experience so much more than their normal daily lives, discover a world they had never seen and may never experience, but also learn about life histories, circumstances and adventures far beyond their limited horizons. This was between 1984-6, and if Freire and Macedo had published their "Literacy: Reading the Word and the World" (1987) by that time, I would have found echoes there.

The same applied to my own understanding of the context I was in. Before arriving in Zimbabwe I had had very little exposure to African literature, except for reading a couple of books by Doris Lessing and Nadine Gordimer, but during my time there I became immersed in Black African writing. I was fortunate because the newly established Zimbabwe Publishing House was producing books from across the continent, by a plethora of African authors whom I had not encountered anywhere before. I read most of the titles available at the time in the ZPH Writers Series: Nigerian author Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart" (1958) and the sequel "No Longer at Ease" (1960), and Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's "The River Between" (1965) and "Petals of Blood" (1977), among many others. I particularly enjoyed the flourishing works of women writers from around the continent, for example Ama Ata Aidoo from Ghana, Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, and Mariama Bâ

from Senegal. Such authors gave me an insight into the lives being lived out all around me, and an entrée into African perspectives that I would not have been able to access in such depth otherwise.

### 0.1.3 Engaging with refugee issues

On returning to the UK in 1986, I undertook a PGCE at Goldsmiths, and worked first as a class teacher, and then as an ethnic minority achievement strategy (EMAS) support teacher with special responsibility for refugee children, for 14 years. My work was entirely in an area of London rich in cultural diversity, where “new arrivals” from other countries were frequent, and where refugees made up a significant part of the school roll. My first real encounter with the horrors of the refugee experience was finding some drawings by an Angolan boy, depicting aircraft dropping bombs, tanks unloading soldiers, amputees with crutches and people sheltering in a church (see Figure 1).

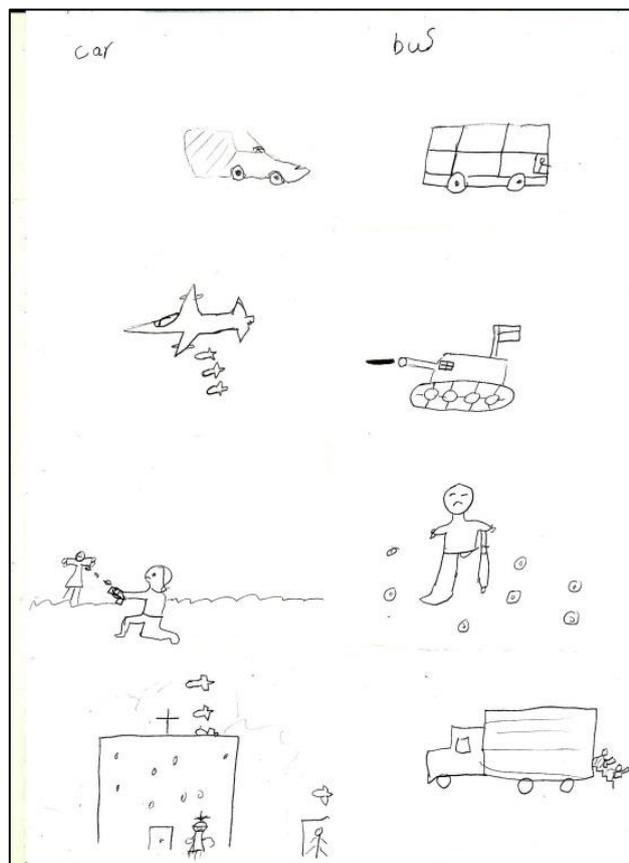


Figure 1: Pictures by a young refugee boy.

This was followed by stories from Kosovan children of running from their burning houses, with no time to collect any belongings, and escaping with only the clothes on their backs at the time. Afghan children also recounted experiences of escaping with their families in the back of blacked out vans, all the way from their mountainous country to the UK, keeping quiet and low as they crossed borders. These stories were indeed shocking and stirred in me a desire to share such knowledge, while a visit to the school by Jill Rutter, working for the Refugee Council, (and appearing later in the study) added depth and breadth to my understanding of the what refugee children and their families had to deal with once in the UK.

Welcoming and integrating refugee children and their parents was the focus of my work in school, and as my experience deepened, my confidence to tackle delicate subjects in a supportive way grew. I began to engage children in autobiographical activity, both oral and written, talking about their reasons for leaving their home country, and the journeys they had undertaken to get to the UK. During Refugee Week some children would offer up their stories in front of an assembly, such was the climate of trust created in the school. I realised that this was a particularly valuable way of getting to know them for the people they were, and validating their experience. Far from wanting to forget the past, they were keen to share their stories, even with someone who had so little connection with their situation as I had.

Having operated only as a practitioner until this point, I enrolled on an MA in Education at Goldsmiths in 2002 and found that I could use my work with refugees as a reference point, adding theory to the experience I had been party to. On a course about children's literature, I decided in a revelatory moment to research books about refugees. The power of narratives to educate non-refugee children and to validate the experiences of refugees, had been part of my teaching, and now I had an opportunity to place it in an academic context. As Coughlan (2012) points out: "books provide an answer, a bridge into the newness, and towards empathy and understanding and

welcome” (ibid, n.p.). I began to investigate texts for children about refugees and discovered that this was a relatively new and growing area, about which very little has been written.

#### **0.1.4 Identifying a new genre**

Early investigations revealed that a considerable amount of children’s literature existed that deals with the subject matter outlined above. Identifying my field as covering post-war children’s books written in English, published in the UK, and dealing with the refugee experience, I found that nearly 90 books exist in this emergent genre (contained in Appendix 1), most of them published in the last two decades, and more are released yearly into the bookshops. I also limited the texts to those which were found to portray the lives of children seeking sanctuary, which, as we can see below, is the legal definition of a refugee. However once I began to research further into the USA, Canadian, Australian and New Zealand markets, as producers and distributors of books for children written in English, as well as a few translated from other languages, I discovered the list was endless, and have concluded my search at well over 200 texts (see Appendix 1). Those published in the USA dominate, in terms of temporality, geographical spread, and linguistic variety, but in recent years the other “old settler colonies” are addressing the topic in new and innovative ways.

Since the 1950s, it is therefore possible to identify numerous books published in the UK, which explore the refugee experience and include stories set in locations as far afield as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Somalia, and Vietnam, targeted at an ever-younger readership. As expected, these texts reflect the waves of migration experienced into western countries in recent years, as conflicts escalate and globalisation, as well as improved travel, leads to a growing number of people claiming sanctuary in other countries. Interestingly books published outside the UK often depict other groups of refugees, such as the Hmong, from Cambodia, who generally settled in the USA, and those from Central and Latin America.

The last fifty years have also seen a change of attitude regarding the suitability of challenging subject matter for young people in the form of children's literature, including forced migration. When *The Silver Sword* (Serrailier, 1956), an early text about children in flight, was first published, it was not readily welcomed into the existing canon of children's literature. On being made into a television serial in 1957 "many people wrote to the head of BBC children's television protesting that war was not a suitable subject for children" (Grossfeld, 1993, p. 192). We have come far over the last 60 years with regards to these issues, to the point where today the stories of children seeking asylum are an increasingly common preoccupation amongst authors, as they endeavour to reflect refugee experiences first hand, or more often vicariously through contact with those who have such life stories. But what role do these books play in today's classrooms? Is it the case, as Coughlan (2010) asserts, that "these inspiring books encourage empathy in their readers, which in turn has the potential to stir them to action. If children are to be empowered to change the world, they need to have access to these stories" (ibid, n.p.)?

## **0.2 Rationale and research questions**

In his study of students' cognitive development Perry (1970) defined a controversial issue as one that is complex and of topical interest, involving conflicting values and opinions, and arousing strong emotions, while Wellington (1986, p. 3) added that it cannot be settled by facts, evidence or experiment alone, and Wooley (2010) felt that controversy "presents challenge and stimulates debate" (ibid p.2). Furthermore, a study of teachers' attitudes and practices in teaching controversial issues by Oulton, et al. (2004) found that many teachers feel under-prepared to tackle controversial issues in the classroom, with very few able to recall any training that they had received either pre-service or in-service, and subsequently were constrained in their ability to handle this aspect of their work. Cowan and Maitles (2012) also identify teacher anxiety over tackling controversial issues, particularly with young children, while Wooley (2010) argues for more support in this area in

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

By extrapolation, teaching about refugee issues can be seen as a controversial area, which can engender emotive discussion. Over the years, as a teacher educator at Goldsmiths, I have introduced a small selection of children's literature about asylum issues, discussed above, into seminars and workshops, through English, Citizenship, and Diversity agendas. Some of my student teachers suggested that the subject matter was not appropriate for young children, while others maintained that children need opportunities to learn about the refugee experience. Several have voiced disquiet about reading some of the texts under discussion in the presence of refugee children, as this may be upsetting for those who have gone through similar experiences, and this is an important perspective, worthy of consideration (Goodall, 2007). However, Melzak and Warner (1992), interviewed Eritrean refugee children in Sweden, revealing a counter-perspective, showing that the young people in the survey wanted the inclusion of refugee children's experiences in the curriculum, and members of refugee community organisations to be invited into school. Obviously a sole piece of research is not endorsement enough, but this ethical problem will be discussed further during the study, and will form part of the ongoing debate.

It is for these reasons that I have begun the title of my study with the words "A Well- Founded Fear". For me, this phrase has a double meaning. According to the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees,

*"The term "refugee" shall apply to any person who...**owing to well-founded fear** of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."*  
(UNHCR, 1951, p. 14)

However in my mind this phrase also addresses students' fears when teaching about refugee issues in primary school, and teachers' reluctance to broach such a controversial area. Not only are they wary of their own lack of

contextual knowledge and ability to handle such a potentially divisive topic, but, as already mentioned, are concerned about the effect of tackling such a sensitive issue in classrooms where children might have experienced similar events themselves. A significant part of my study is therefore to ascertain whether these reservations constitute “well-founded fears.” It is also important to note that some of the children referred to as refugees in the study may well come from a refugee background, instead of having directly experienced persecution and flight themselves, and others may be asylum seekers (in other words, seeking refugee status, see Chapter 2). However, for the purposes of the research, I refer to them all using the generic term “refugee”.

Having identified a significant genre developing in its own right, I wanted to investigate how far children’s literature about refugees could validate the lived experience of children who had experienced forced migration. “Validate” seemed the correct term to use, defined as “demonstrate or support the truth or value of; make or declare legally valid; recognize or affirm the validity or worth of (a person or their feelings or opinions); cause (a person) to feel valued or worthwhile” (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). As regards the refugee experience, it implies both the endorsement of a real situation and feelings emanating from this, but also of a recognised official position, the latter of less concern to children, but nevertheless an important part of the right to claim sanctuary. I hoped to find out whether such books were validators in the classroom setting, helping refugee children to find acceptance and even pride in their family history, or whether they might be subject to unwelcome exposure and stigmatisation as a result, part of the fear sometimes suggested by teachers. I also wanted to consider the use of children’s literature for educating non-refugee children about the experience of others, and engage with the broader question of whether literature has the potential to change attitudes.

Using just two books in a small scale case study, namely Mary Hoffman’s *The Colour of Home* (2002) and Beverley Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth* (2000), both published in the UK, and used extensively in English classrooms, my overarching research question is therefore:

## **What role can children’s literature play in understanding and validating the refugee experience?**

I tackle this question through a vertical approach, looking at the author/reader dynamic, examining whether authors’ intentions are realised in the reading experience, but also appreciating that when sharing books in the primary classroom, the teacher is a powerful agent in the process. My vertical study is therefore reflected in a further set of questions, which break down the first one into targeted areas of focus, and follow an author/teacher/child trajectory as follows:

- **What are the motivations of authors who write about the refugee experience for children? What are their aims?**
- **How are these books mediated by teachers when sharing them with children?**
- **How do refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to these texts?**

These are searching questions and my intention is to open up an area to debate, which has not been the subject of any systematic study prior to this. In addressing these questions I have gathered opinions from authors, teachers, and child readers, and observed the two books in question being read and studied in several primary classrooms. However first I will conduct a short review of the genre and studies of such books, a discussion of what constitutes the “refugee experience”, and an overview of theoretical approaches with relevance to children’s literature, in the next three chapters.

# **Chapter 1 – Children’s Books about Refugees and Wider Agendas**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Although there are a growing number of children’s books that deal with the refugee experience, it has not so far been identified as a genre for academic study. This chapter therefore begins with an overview of the field, from World War II until the present day, including commentators’ views, and considers the background of authors who engage in writing about the refugee experience. This very brief overview of key children’s literature about refugees is taken from a UK perspective. However some of the books cited have been published elsewhere and have become widely known and used in the UK. There is not sufficient time in this study to consider in depth the wealth of titles published in the US, and also in Canada, Australia and New Zealand on the topic, as the focus of the work is primarily on the role of these texts in the UK primary classroom. I then set this narrow field among a broader scope of children’s books with sensitive, controversial and socio-political subject matter, to place my focus of study within wider, relevant discussions, namely children’s literature about war and the Holocaust, and a discussion of “race” and racism in children’s books. After a short review of studies that consider the responses of children to such subject matter, I introduce the two books which form the backbone of my case study, with a brief overview of content and some initial comparisons, to set the scene.

## **1.2 Tracing the development of the genre**

### **1.2.1 From World War II to the millennium**

Arguably, the first post-war book to be published in the UK, written about and by a refugee child, is the widely known and chilling *Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl*, published by Anne’s father in 1947 in the Netherlands (Anne Frank Museum, n.d.), and soon after in the US and the UK (Frank, 1952). However,

although Anne is a refugee, being a German Jew who had fled to Amsterdam before the diary begins, it can be argued that the book is not a typical example of children's literature about the refugee experience. The fact that it centres on a long period of incarceration means that it avoids dealing with the usual range of factors to which refugees are exposed. I would therefore suggest that *The Silver Sword* (Serrailier, 1956) can claim to be the first post-war children's book published in the UK, which has the refugee experience as its central theme. Lathey (2005a) asserts that this book marks "a turning point from the popular, patriotic appeal of earlier war stories" (ibid, p. 62) to promote a didactic, even implicitly pacifist, message of the long term consequences of war. It has lasted as a class reader in schools for over fifty years, and has never gone out of print, testimony to the compelling nature of the subject matter, children still being attracted to the idea of young people taking control of their destiny and depending on each other without adult support. As well as being full of dramatic tension and vivid images, Agnew and Fox argue that the book does translate to present-day situations and makes

*"the suffering of refugees accessible to readers when filtered through the literary restraints of the time"* (2001, p. 172)

Following this, *A Bear Called Paddington* by Michael Bond (1958) has been seen by Hunt and Sands (2000) as dubious in its depiction of a bear from "Darkest Peru", who can only assimilate by forgetting his past life, amongst a display of fond images of empire in a post-imperial Britain. However Smith (2006) sees the book as an early foray into the positive depiction of a refugee in children's literature, offering a departure from the past in that Paddington himself is

*"an evacuee to London, not from it, thus framing London as a safe haven rather than a war-time place of danger"* (ibid, p. 37).

The 1960s and 1970s saw the publication of two seminal books addressing the refugee situation, *I am David* by Annie Holm (1965), originally published in Danish in 1963, and the first of a trilogy by Judith Kerr, creator of the famous

*Mog* books (1970-2002), and the much loved *The Tiger Who Came To Tea* (1968), entitled *When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit* (1971). Holm's book is an impressive piece of fiction which has been made into a feature film, and is deliberately mysterious and unfathomable. Its political and historical location is unique in that it is set in the Cold War, and deals with a boy escaping from a Bulgarian labour camp, under the then Communist regime (Marshall, n.d.). None of this is explicit and for children it is merely an adventure story, which also depicts the inner psychic world of a child who has been incarcerated for most of his life. Kerr's work, however, deals with the author's lightly fictionalised story of escaping Nazi Germany, and fleeing to Switzerland, France and then England. Lathey (2005a) cautions against accepting such accounts of wartime childhoods at face value, but although the time lapse may have led her to view her journey through rose-coloured spectacles, Lathey (1999) notes,

*"Kerr writes with feeling about the frustration of being unable to express herself in a new language"* (ibid, p. 51)

Interestingly family separation is presented as the greatest fear, rather than the refugee experience, and as such presents a valuable child's insight.

Again, the theme of Jewish refugees escaping Nazism during World War II is the subject matter of Lois Lowry's *Number the Stars* (1989), and Michael Murpurgo's *Waiting for Anya* (1990). The support of the general population for those in flight, from Denmark to Sweden in the former, and France to Spain in the latter, makes for dramatic and compelling subject matter. Both are full of suspense, Lowry, in particular, creating a celebratory story of the strength of the human spirit which "delivers a distinctive lesson in ethical decision-making and behaviour" (Russell, 1997, p. 268) as a ten-year-old Danish girl helps her Jewish friend and family escape to Sweden. As it reminds us in a postscript that nearly 7,000 Jewish people were similarly smuggled by the Danes to Sweden (Lowry, 1989, p. 135), it chooses to focus on one of the most positive and affirming chapters of an otherwise bleak outlook (Jordon, 2004). It also introduces the idea of the "righteous Gentile", as the latter book depicts the

“good German”, helpful and friendly to the children “beyond the call of duty” (Fox, 2001, p. 50) and turning a blind eye as they cross the Pyrenees into freedom. Nevertheless, the picture is still of the refugee experience as a wartime event, rather than a living reality for present day children in our classrooms, and the focus is almost exclusively on the journey to safety.

However important these retrospectives are, there has been, nevertheless, a danger that the refugee experience was presented to children only in terms of the past (MacSween & Laird, 2010), and it is vital that we address the modern age, for our young people to understand that wars, persecution and flight are contemporary experiences as well. As Mary Hoffman (2003) writes for her young audience, in the introduction to *Lines in the Sand: New Writing on War and Peace*, an anthology of poems and short stories:

*“You may be studying war at your school and learning about trenches and gas masks. But do you realise how many wars have been going on in the world since the last World War ended in 1945?”* (ibid, p. 4)

While many children’s books about refugees have focussed on the historical context, maybe with the intention of employing a distancing technique, it is interesting to note that more recent literature on this topic now looks at current themes, growing out of present conflicts and modern life-experiences.

Furthermore as Agnew and Fox observe:

*“Late twentieth-century children’s novels present their protagonists not as heroic or saintly figures, but as ordinary people caught up in terrible events. Above all they demonstrate the inner strength, resourcefulness and determination of ordinary people, rather than the glamorised heroics of earlier novels”* (2001, p. 56).

However it was not until the 1990s that the stage widened to encompass contemporary conflicts. The growing number of refugees arriving in the UK is paralleled by a dramatic increase in related books, beginning with Elizabeth Laird’s *Kiss the Dust* (1991), the story of an Iraqi Kurdish girl and her family, who flee to Iran and thence to the UK, dealing impressively with all aspects of forced migration. This text marked a turning-point in refugee stories, with the

arrival of modern conflicts mirrored in children's literature, and as Graham (2000) comments "with television and air-conditioning in the book, it does not feel like historical fiction" (ibid, p. 58). Interviewed at a conference in 2008, Laird (2010) disclosed that had she been writing the book 17 years later, she might have given the protagonist "a bit more power" (ibid, p.119), despite the powerlessness of her situation, in order to end on a more positive note. With reference to the same text, Pinsent (1997) observed that

*"In recent years there have been a number of books which have represented the encounter between the expectations of the educational system and the experiences of children who have come into it speaking little or no English"* (ibid, p. 110).

She argues that they function to guide first language English readers to understand the problems facing refugees, but also help children, as they become more competent in English, to come to terms with their situation.

### **1.2.2 Relating recent writing and geographical location**

With the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it was inevitable that several texts would have these events as their focus, such as Christobel Mattingley's *No Gun for Asmir* (1993), based on the story of a Bosnian family fleeing to Austria, the author meeting the real life "Asmir" in person and learning his story. *Zlata's Diary* by Zlata Filipović (1994) also makes compelling reading. Reporter Janine di Giovanni, who met Zlata in 1993 and wrote the introduction to the book, described Zlata as "the Anne Frank of Sarajevo", and her diary is unusual in being written between the age of 10 and 13, as events unfolded around her. Seeing the privations of urban warfare in Sarajevo through the eyes of a young girl, as well as the attempts to continue with normality while nightly shell bombardments gradually wrecked the city's infrastructure and her family's lives, has a shocking immediacy, even more so as it is an autobiographical account (discussed below). Gaye Hicyilmaz's (1998) *Smiling for Strangers* is also set in war-torn Bosnia and follows a middle-class teen, fleeing from the violence that engulfed her family in Sarajevo aboard an aid convoy truck to England, and hoping to find help from

a former acquaintance of her mother. Hicyilmaz, a writer who is “able to combine elements of two cultures and their meeting points into an artistic whole” (Lathey, 2001, p. 4), also highlights the unending plight of the Roma people of Eastern Europe, often compounded by fleeing to the UK, in two further works which make an enduring contribution to refugee children’s literature, *The Girl in Red* (2000) and *Pictures from the Fire* (2003).

Since its invasion in 2001, Afghanistan has been the subject of several books, particularly dealing with the stories of children surviving and fleeing from the Taliban. Deborah Ellis’ trilogy *The Breadwinner* (2001), *Pavana’s Journey* (2002), and *Mud City* (2004) traces a young girl having to disguise herself as a boy to fend for her family, travelling to try and find her father and subsequently escaping to Pakistan, and has won several awards. The first book in the series has been widely used in London primary schools, and lesson plans have been developed by the author, as well as other teachers. Furthermore, the renowned Australian children’s author Morris Gleitzman took a new departure in following Jamal and Bibi from Afghanistan to an Australian detention centre in *Boy Overboard* (2003) and *Girl Underground* (2004). Two recent books also focus on the Middle East, but with highly contrasting styles. Michael Morpurgo, the former Children’s Laureate, has addressed the refugee experience in *Shadow* (2010), also set in Afghanistan, which depicts the friendship between a British soldier’s dog and an Afghan boy, the bond between child and animal being a familiar theme for Morpurgo. *Azzi in Between* by Sarah Garland (2012) is a graphic novel for the younger age-group, concerning a young girl from a Persian family escaping their home in an unnamed country, a deliberate choice on the part of the author.

Another significant area of the world which contains a huge number of refugees and even more displaced people, is the vast continent of Africa, and whilst clearly not a homogenous whole, it is noticeable in its paucity of stories which reflect the experience of many of its inhabitants. Several books start in an African setting but then move swiftly to the UK context, for example Bernard Ashley’s *Little Soldier* (1999), told in a series of flashbacks, of a child soldier’s problems of integration from a fictional country in Central Africa to

South East London. The horrific reality of Kaninda's history and his subsequent difficulties in encountering conflict in the UK make for powerful reading, but a link with the lengthy warfare in Angola and the Congo is not made explicit. While the protagonist of Benjamin Zephaniah's famous text *Refugee Boy* (2001) is half Ethiopian, half Eritrean, the book focusses almost entirely on his experiences in the UK and the campaign mounted by his classmates to fight his deportation. Two very popular books, already mentioned, which are the focus of this study, also have partly African settings. Mary Hoffman's *The Colour of Home* depicting a Somali boy's struggle to join a UK school, is to be found in many London classrooms in the lower age primary age group, while, Beverley Naidoo's *The Other Side of Truth* and its sequel, *Web of Lies* (2004), follows two Nigerian children, being smuggled into the UK, both of which will be dealt with at length later in the chapter. Finally *Christophe's Story* by Nikki Cornwell (2006), and its sequel *Ahmel's Revenge* (2011) tackles the tricky subject of the Rwandan genocide, sensitively crafted for young children.

### **1.2.3 Other perspectives**

Some writers focus exclusively on what happens to refugee children when they come to this country, for example by highlighting campaigns to fight deportation, such as in *Refugee Boy* (already mentioned) and *A Fight to Belong* by Alan Gibbons (1999), where the indigenous population protests on behalf of the asylum seeker or migrant family and secure their future. Another angle taken is to view the plight of the refugee through a friendship between an English young person and an asylum seeker, as in *The Dark Beneath* also by Alan Gibbons (2003) and *Ruby Tanya* by Robert Swindells (2004). This technique is designed to foster empathy for the newcomer, filtered through the eyes of the narrator, with whom the reader is expected to identify. Recently modern perspectives are chillingly represented by Deborah Ellis in *No Safe Place* (2010) where young people meet from global locations in Calais, finally to be smuggled across the Channel to the UK.

Several picture books about the refugee experience have appeared since the millennium from UK writers, *The Colour of Home* by Mary Hoffman (2002), previously mentioned and outlined below, and *Petar's Song* by Pratima Mitchell (2004), which is (perhaps deliberately) frustrating in its lack of geographical specificity. The cunningly-entitled *The Silence Seeker* by Ben Morley (2009) addresses the problems of a refugee adapting to a British urban landscape in a very simple but effective form. As a new development, the UK publisher, Frances Lincoln, well-known for commissioning children's books that deal with "difference", has produced four "Refugee Diaries", by Anthony Robinson and Annemarie Young (2008), (2009a) (2009b) (2010) which depict the real lives of four young people from the Congo, Chechnya, and Iraqi and Turkish Kurdistan. Using a combination of photographs, illustrations, maps, the children's stories and factual information to conclude, the books contain a useful mixture of resources.

#### **1.2.4 Personal testimony, autobiography, and authenticity**

The importance of personal testimony to distil experience has been continually reflected upon, no less by Primo Levi (1988), writer and survivor of Auschwitz:

*"One single Anne Frank moves us more than the countless others who suffered just as she did but whose faces have remained in the shadows. Perhaps it is better that way; if we were capable of taking in all the suffering of all those people we would not be able to live."* (ibid, p. 56)

Some, but very few, of the books identified as dealing with the refugee experience are autobiographical, particularly not about modern conflicts, and the reasons for this will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3, when migration literature as a genre is examined. However I would suggest that those that do exist have a particular authenticity and resonance, over and above fiction by authors who have not experienced the stories they are telling first hand, and the works are immediately lent gravitas, guiding the reader to accept the content as "truth". Obviously the two diaries mentioned above, that of Anne Frank and Zlata, are accounts of first-hand experience, but other than that

Judith Kerr's trilogy is the only one written from an autobiographical perspective (although highly fictionalised, as she was very young at the time.) However, if we look at all the authors mentioned above, it is interesting to note that many have a connection with the migrant experience, mainly by family association, or have come from a post-colonial background (this term being discussed more fully in Chapter 3, and the biographies of Naidoo and Hoffman being considered in more depth in Chapter 5). Furthermore, Rutter suggests that writers such as Ellis, Hicyilmaz, Hoffman, Laird, Naidoo and were all heavily influenced in their choice of subject matter by the strong work of the refugee charities sector in the UK and internationally<sup>1</sup>.

Gamble and Yates (2008) note that there are "some very good books written by writers who, although they do not live in the places they are writing about, have visited or conducted careful research" (ibid, p. 155). Elizabeth Laird is an example of this. Born in New Zealand, but growing up in South London, she has travelled far and wide, living and working in Malaysia, Ethiopia, India, Iraq and Lebanon (Laird, n.d.), and has written books about children from many of these locations. Questions are always asked about whether an outsider can legitimately tell the story of a group to which they do not belong, but Gamble and Yates (2008) ask how else these stories might be made available, and suggest that sometimes the outsider's objectivity can "mediate to make the unfamiliar understandable" (ibid, p. 155). Stewart (2008) points out that Deborah Ellis, herself from Canada, wrote *The Breadwinner Trilogy* after travelling to Afghanistan and Pakistan, interviewing refugee women in camps there, which she later wrote up in reportage form (Ellis, 2000) (Ellis, n.d.). Similarly Gay Hicyilmaz spent several years living in Turkey with her Turkish husband. Pinsent (1997) notes, with reference to Hicyilmaz's work, that a few children's books

*"which seem to create a rather fuller picture of the situation of immigrants lacking the language of the countries they are forced to live in are by writers who have a close involvement with the culture they are depicting"* (ibid, p. 114).

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication: 06/07/15

Sometimes travel stimulates a departure from an author's usual oeuvre, for example *Azzi In Between* (Garland, 2012), being written after a trip to New Zealand (Garland, n.d.), and a far cry from Garland's former books, characterising a chaotic middle-class family enjoying a cosy Middle England family life. Nikki Cornwell's work as an interpreter for asylum seekers and refugees led her "into the dark world of their stories and (she has) witnessed their suffering", about which she writes eloquently on her website (Cornwell, n.d.). Bernard Ashley, already having a reputation as "a 'gritty' writer in sympathy with the underdog" (Amazon, n.d.), went to Uganda as part of his research for *Little Soldier* (1999). However, it is unknown whether Gleitzman, Morpurgo and Garland have ever been to Afghanistan, Zephaniah to Eritrea, or Mattingly to Sarajevo, a subject that will be returned to in the study. As "gatekeepers" of the refugee experience, these authors arguably have a responsibility to their readers, if not using personal testimony or autobiography, to present well-researched, sensitive writing that is as factually accurate as possible, and does not "other" refugees (see Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this concept).

### **1.3 Widening the scope**

#### **1.3.1 Children's literature and war**

Lathey (2005a) notes that the last decades of 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a big increase in children's books about war, offering a realistic treatment, to the extent that it is now a common subject. Wars within living memory have inspired the largest volume of children's fiction. In the post war era, writing went through a "sea change in written mode, content and purpose" (ibid, p. 62), but with picture books for younger children tending to

*"mediate the harshness of their subject matter by couching a pacifist message in an allegorical tale... or through the use of colour and tone"* (ibid, p. 63).

Academic debate focuses on several points, the shift in what is deemed acceptable subject matter for children concerning war and its attendant horror, how perspectives on war have changed over time, and the role of autobiography within the genre. Lathey (ibid) plots the extended boundaries of what is suitable to children, and notes the transition from the adventure story to more of a family focus, looking at evacuation and separation, danger and readjustment of refugees. Reynolds (2005) notes how writers dwell on themes of loss, grief, mourning, and survival, many of which are similar to those in children's literature for refugees.

The 2014 centenary of the start of World War I has also led to a resurgence of interest in that conflict, and children's literature has not escaped this zeitgeist. Following the overwhelming success of Michael Morpurgo's *War Horse* (1982) as a text, a film and a play, the author has recently published *Listen to the Moon* (2014), to coincide with the commemorations. Similarly Morpurgo's (2003) *Private Peaceful*, also made into a feature film, has been re-worked as a stage play and is touring the country. MacCallum-Stewart (2007) looks at how children's literature deploys a "parable" of war which is

*"an emotive, literary retelling of the war based on a series of texts and cultural shifts rather than on historical perspectives"* (ibid, p. 176).

She feels that modern First World War narratives employ a present-day lens, which promulgates one way of seeing, not allowing for alternative visions, or even widely held behaviours and beliefs at the time. Furthermore, war fiction for children is hampered by the need to put forward a unilateral anti-war message, contemporary writing being "just as - if not more - didactic" (ibid, p. 78). This is a viewpoint that has intensified in the run-up to the centenary of the start of the Great War, at the time of writing (Mail Online, 2014).

Agnew and Fox (2001) assert that nowadays there is a strong feeling that young people should know about the cruelty of human beings, so that they can learn lessons from the past. Writing about the realities of the Holocaust, for example, is now cast in ways that former generations would have deemed

unsuitable for children. Fascination with World War II seems to grow rather than diminish with time, to feed our thirst for drama and adventure, and this is reflected in the continual writing and publication of children's books about that time. Furthermore there is

*“a gradual shift – especially in the United Kingdom – from the cultural certainties of 1914 to the pluralism and ambiguities of 2000”* (ibid, p. 1).

Familiar classics are Nina Bawden's *Carrie's War* (1973), Robert Westall's *The Machine-Gunners* (1975), Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mr Tom* (1981), and Michael Foreman's *War Boy* (1989). All are directly or loosely autobiographical, and while both women authors deal primarily with evacuation, the other two depict life on the home front through the eyes of a boy protagonist, communicating in both cases “a heady sense of danger and excitement” (Lathey, 2005b, p. 79) and a sense of nostalgia and national pride that belongs to a world long gone. Children's literature about World War II very often has an autobiographical flavour. The individual childhoods in these books are sometimes those of the authors themselves, or people they knew. Telling the story may also be a cathartic act for writers, resolving something in their own experience, and thus having “a unique intensity” (Agnew & Fox, 2001, p. 138).

A comparative study of children's literature and war in the UK, Belgium and Portugal produced an annotated trilingual selection of 200 books across the three countries (Leysen, et al., 1999). As part of this team, Fox (2001) notes that English accounts of wartime life for children, were “particularly susceptible to a certain amount of nostalgia and myth-making” (ibid, p. 45), while Lathey (2005b) feels that comparing British and German perspectives on the Second World War contrast “a sense of national pride on the one hand, and collective national guilt on the other” (ibid, p. 77). More recent conflicts are also reflected such as in Robert Westall's *Gulf* (1992), set in the 1990 Gulf war with a “political edge” (Lathey, 2005a, p. 63) and imagining the lives of young Iraqi soldiers in the conflict. Pinsent (1997) argues that this book takes a very

modern perspective, in seeking to show that any point of view about an international conflict is conditioned by the media.

### **1.3.2 Writing for children about the Holocaust**

Since *Emil and Karl* (Glatshetyn, 1940) was first published in Yiddish, during the early days of the Holocaust, how to represent this terrible event in a form that is palatable to children has been a challenge for authors who feel an obligation to share the topic with a young age group. Holocaust literature is dominated by two concerns, that of paying homage to those who perished, and an attempt to forestall the recurrence of such barbarity (Baer, 2000). Lathey (2005b) asserts that children's books about the Holocaust would have been unthinkable in the first three decades after the war and Sokoloff (2005) records "an explosion of imaginative writing for young people on the topic" (ibid, p. 175) since the mid-1980s. Similarly Holocaust education has become mandatory in the US, the UK, and around the world, being introduced in Secondary School in this country in 1990 (Russell, 2006). Alongside the texts themselves, a sizeable body of theoretical analysis has developed, critiquing the content and form of these books, but also looking at the potential of literature as a teaching tool through which to tackle this sensitive and harrowing subject. Russell (1997) points out that "it is important to realize that art of the Holocaust is necessarily didactic art" (ibid, p. 268).

Teaching about the Holocaust in primary school has been necessarily restricted to the upper age-range, where it might be introduced as part of a History topic about World War II, or within the Literacy curriculum, perhaps through a reading of Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* (1952), which may well be a better entrée. Russell notes,

*"Art, which focuses on the particular, may have greater power to move our emotions than do the numbing statistics of history"* (Russell, 1997, p. 267).

Although there are a plethora of titles in the field, debate encircles a few strong texts. One such is Hans Peter Richter's *Friedrich* (1987), published originally

in German in 1961, being autobiographically based on the friendship between a Jewish boy and a Gentile, and part of “a first wave of German writers to address the persecution of German Jews” (Lathey, 2005b, p. 80). Other books growing in popularity, but also in controversy, are Roberto Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche* (1985), re-written for the English-speaking market by Ian McEwan, and the grim and allegorical graphic novel, Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale* (1991), aimed originally at an adult readership. Most recently, criticism and acclaim has been directed at John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), now a major feature film, and Morris Gleitzman’s series: *Once* (2005), *Then* (2009), *Now* (2010), and *After* (2012), all aimed at young readers and discussed below.

Kimmel (1977) suggested that we need a variety of texts to understand this complex and multifaceted experience, and tried to classify them under a schema. He categorised the books in a series of concentric rings, moving from resistance/rescue novels to refugee novels, Occupation novels, Jewish resistance novels, and finally stories of the death camps. Lathey (1999) also calls for the use of comparative texts in the classroom, which offer differing perspectives of the Second World War, and encourages reading books in translation to include a European or world context, such as *Friedrich* (1987), and also the much debated *Rose Blanche* (Innocenti, 1985). Sullivan (1999) further documented Holocaust literature for youth, asserting that it should be seen in the context of other genocides, and should lead children to question their own capabilities, and make meaning, rather than being instructed.

Following Adorno’s (1973) famous, but often misunderstood, declaration that to “write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”, Baer (2000) addresses the paradox of “The Literature of Atrocity” (Langer, 1995) and its potential to “instruct but not delight” (Baer, 2000, p. 380), given that it is simultaneously deemed “unspeakable”, but a story that must be told. She suggests that the author carries a responsibility to their readership, and should include “a chronology of events, a glossary, maps” (ibid, 385). Williams (2001) again questions this tension between a work of literature and a mode of instruction, and Bosmajian (2002) asserts that by focusing on rescue and escape,

kindness and ingenuity, the full nature of the atrocities is by-passed, romanticizing the Holocaust as a “gruesome adventure story” (ibid, 185). Further she questions any attempt to make meaning and resolution, or even a hopeful or “happy” ending, which are central to writing for children, but incompatible with the subject matter. Kertzer (2002) also perceives Holocaust children’s literature to be employing “strategies that inevitably diminish, distance, and distort” (ibid, 38) that may lead to miseducation, and lack of respect, while sanitizing approaches might function to breed insensitivity. Meanwhile Kidd (2005) sees a shift away from the idea that young readers should be protected from evil, towards an expectation of “reading about trauma to be traumatic itself”, and without which children cannot fully comprehend atrocity (ibid, 120). He sees that the Holocaust has functioned “as a sort of primal scene of children’s trauma literature” (ibid, 121), authorising the engagement with other extremely difficult areas since the mid-1990s, as both “therapeutic and testimonial” (ibid, 122).

All the above issues have been re-worked recently, through the work of two writers who have yet again “grasped the unimaginable” (Gilbert, 2010, p. 355) and tackled the Holocaust in differing ways but both aimed at a younger readership (for ages 10 – 14). Australian author, Morris Gleitzman (mentioned above) has now written four books in a series, entitled *Once* (2005), *Then* (2009), *Now* (2010), and *After* (2012), which follow Felix, a 10-year old Jewish boy, on a gradual path of realisation about the horrors of the Holocaust and the probable fate of his parents. In contrast, *The Boy in Striped Pyjamas* (2006), by John Boyne, is narrated through the eyes of Bruno, a 9-year old German boy, whose father becomes commandant of Auschwitz, while Bruno befriends a Jewish contemporary, Shmuel, in the camp, and eventually is murdered in a gas chamber with him. However Gilbert (2010) points out that although this book has sold over five million copies worldwide, been adapted into a major feature film, and is recommended reading in UK Secondary schools, it is highly unsatisfactory in its historical inaccuracies and “blunt didacticism” (ibid, 357), receiving polarised reviews. Gilbert questions whether the book actually “performs a progressive educative role” (ibid) in contrast to Gleitzman’s novels which she feels “confront the child reader with a complex

set of ideas about the relationship between narrative and subjectivity” (ibid), and the difficulty of representing “the unspeakable” (Kidd, 2005, p. 141).

### **1.3.3 Race and racism in children’s books**

*“It was not until the 1970s and the beginnings of legislation dealing with issues of discrimination in society that significant numbers of children’s authors began to take on board issues of equality. During this period there was an increasing awareness of how literature could affect social attitudes”* (Pinsent, 2005, p. 192).

Children’s books in former times projected a narrow view of possible identities, mainly male (though sometimes female), middle class and white, and were often didactic in intention. In the mid-1970s, however, despite the growing number of books reflecting the “minority experience” (Stinton, 1979, p. 145), there were still only mainly white authors, editors and publishers involved. In the last few decades, in line with the development of post-colonial adult literature, there has been an opening up of the field, with an attempt to project images of children from a variety of ethnicities, backgrounds, cultures and classes, with the effect of increasing children’s awareness of difference (Hunt, 1991). However progress is slow, and critiques have been plentiful.

Major debates centre on whether the author’s ethnicity matters in writing children’s literature in which race or racism is an issue, questioning whether if the author has roots in the culture about which they are writing, this adds authenticity, a topic that is discussed later in Chapter 5. Paul (2009) notes that when white American author Ezra Jack Keats depicted a little black boy as his central character in *The Snowy Day* (1962) a turning point had been reached, but criticisms of stereotyping in this and subsequent books still reverberate. Petronella Breinburg is recognized as one of the first black authors in Britain to write picture books featuring black children, notably *My Brother Sean* (1973), about a boy’s first day at school. However Klein (1985) enters an often held debate about the efficacy of some books in tackling racism. Frequently cited examples are *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor (1969), *The Slave Dancer* by Paula Fox (1973), *The Trouble with Donovan Croft* by

Bernard Ashley (1974), and *My Mate Shofiq* by Jan Needle (1978), all of which have white authors, who while well-meaning, have been questioned for including racist sentiments, or for their depiction of white/black dualities and stereotypes.

Among other well-known books which tackle race issues or depict the lives of black children is that by the black American writer Mildred Taylor *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) the first book in the Logan family saga, set in the “Deep South” of the USA at the time of the Depression. This text is the subject of much critical analysis and debate including from Brooks and Hampton (2005), who see it as a pivotal text for “experiencing, confronting and overcoming racism” (ibid, p. 85). Beverley Naidoo’s *Journey to Jo’burg* (1985) and two successive novels depict repression in apartheid South Africa, and forcible removal to the “homelands”, Naidoo coming from South Africa herself, but very being conscious of her different perspective as a privileged white child. Controversially *Journey to Jo’burg* was banned in South Africa until 1991, as being too political.

Hoffman’s *Amazing Grace* (1991) in which a Black girl in the UK auditions for and gains the part of Peter Pan, with the encouragement of her mother and grandmother, combats both racism and sexism. This book spawned the “Grace” series, illustrated by the celebrated Caroline Binch, and although highly successful, has been the subject of some controversy. Pinsent (1997), along with others, tackles the position of the non-black author portraying Black protagonists, but dismisses this as a problem. However some stories might be seen to “exoticise” a rural setting in post-colonial locations, such as Eileen Browne’s *Handa’s Surprise* (1994) set in Kenya, Caroline Binch’s *Gregory Cool* (1994) in Tobago, and Mary Hoffman’s *Grace and Family* (1995) in the Gambia. Pinsent (1997) asserts that

*“what is needed is an integrated attitude which respects the appearance and the traditions of all people; this means that anyone who shares these ideals, who makes the effort to become well informed, and has the ability to write or illustrate well, should not hesitate about making their contribution to this genre”* (ibid, 106).

Black writers were boosted by the founding of the publishing house Tamarind Books, by Verna Wilkins in 1987 with the mission of “redressing the balance of diversity in children’s publishing” (Tamarind Books, n.d.). More recently authors such as Trish Cooke (a writer of Caribbean heritage) have depicted characteristic Black British culture and creole language patterns in *So Much* (Cooke, 1994), which would have been unacceptable to British publishers a few years before (Pinsent, 1997), and the present Children’s Laureate, Malorie Blackman whose

*“books mark the welcome arrival on the scene of reader-friendly writing by black women authors without going out of her way to feature race”* (Pinsent, 1997, p. 88).

This was indeed Blackman’s position, until she embarked on the *Noughts and Crosses* (2001) series, written between 2001 and 2008, of a mixed race romance set in an apartheid-style distopia (Rustin, 2013). Very recently Malorie Blackman has been subject to deplorable racist abuse on twitter for advocating more diversity in children’s literature (Flood, 2014).

Bishop (1982), writing in the US context, divides children’s literature about “blacks” into three categories: *social conscience books*, written by and for whites, *melting pot* books, written by and for both black and “nonblacks”, celebrating universal similarities, and *culturally conscious* books reflecting the distinctive cultural and social aspects of growing up black. One assumption is that African American children’s literature is written primarily for black children (Barker, 2010), though interestingly we do not assume that children’s literature about refugees is written for refugees. Bishop (1990) argues that children have a right to books that reflect their own images and also that open different worlds to them.

*“Books are sometimes windows, offering views of worlds that may be real or imagined, familiar or strange. These windows are also sliding glass doors, and readers have only to walk through in imagination to become part of whatever world has been created or recreated by the author. When lighting conditions are just right, however, a window can also be a mirror. Literature transforms human experience and reflects it*

*back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books” (Bishop, 1990).*

She reflects on the lack of children’s books that reflect minority groups, but also points out that those from the dominant group need books that help them understand the multicultural “salad bowl” that is American society.

Nevertheless, Schwart (1995) challenges this view as too simplistic.

*“Mirrors and windows do not suffice. A critical postmodern pedagogy... implies a much more global understanding of our place in social reality” (ibid, n.p).*

Schwart maintains that an “us and them”, or “we and The Other” duality is unhelpful, and I would consider that this also applies to a division between refugee and non-refugee readers, discussed more fully later. More useful is to live “*sin fronteras*, to be a crossroads, to build bridges rather than walls” (ibid, n. p). However it is still unclear what the term “multicultural” children’s books comprises, and where the divisions lie.

Klein (1985) acknowledges the powerful role of the teacher in the selection of such books and questions whether we should “sanitize or sensitize” (ibid, p. 108) children’s literature and learning materials, by censoring (i.e. sanitizing), or alerting children to bias and engaging in critique (i.e. sensitizing). Stinton’s (1979) basic consideration for omitting a book for recommendation was “the pain it might give to even one black child” (ibid, p. 70), but she also felt that “the book must be appropriate for use in (1) an all-black classroom, (2) an all-white classroom, and (3) an integrated classroom” (ibid). This position will have resonances later when children in my study consider whether *The Other Side of Truth* should be used in the primary classroom if a refugee child who had been through a similar set of circumstances were present.

## 1.4 *Listening to children*

Meek (1987) asserts that we need studies of children's literature that include the opinions of young readers today. Adults writing about the subject bring the sum total of their experience to the text, and can have a closed view of the impact of a book. "We need to see children 'performing' meaning under the influence of texts and learning to *traffic in possibilities*"(sic) (ibid, p. 113). Hollindale (1988) differentiates between "book people" and "child people" who engage in debate

*"about differences of literary merit (book people) and about the influence on readers of a book's social and political values (child people)"* (ibid, p. 4).

In order to engage in "childist" criticism (Hunt, 1991) and challenge Nodelman's (1992) famous comparison between children's literary criticism and colonialism, children themselves must be consulted about the literature we are choosing for them, and their voices must be heard in critiquing it. As Barrs and Cork (2001) put it

*"We are not very good at discovering what children think they are doing when they read, but if we ask them, they tell us things that we, as their teachers, might never have thought of"* (ibid, p. 14).

We need to extend the "politics of voice", notably part of postcolonial theory, (Spivak, 1988), (hooks, 1990), to that of child readers too, and very few studies have included children's opinions of the content and subject matter of a book, rather than just assessing the pedagogical implications of textual discussion, noted by Gubar (2013), who calls for a rise in the "risky business" of including children in children's literature criticism.

Naidoo (1992) spent a year with a class of young white people engaged in reading literature from perspectives strongly indicting racism (including *Friedrich* and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* previously mentioned) in order to investigate the possibilities of changing attitudes and challenging racism through literature. Although the work had brought about instances when

children had been opened up to 'difference', she reported no concrete evidence of fostering anti-racism but felt that the effects of the learning experience might not be apparent until some time later. Lehr (1995) worked with a class of US fourth-graders (approximately 9 years old) for two months observing, teaching and talking with children, introducing them to stories about children "living under oppression and fleeing oppression" (ibid, p. 116), including *Journey to Jo'Burg* and *Kiss the Dust* (previously mentioned). The children read these challenging books mostly independently, but also used maps, globes, and non-fiction resources to help them fill in the context. They met with Lehr once a day for an hour to discuss their reading, and also kept reading logs. What emerged was that the books

*"increased the children's knowledge about the world, expanded their personal views about freedom, and provided shocking glimpses of social injustice"* (Lehr, 1995, p. 117).

Lehr's vision of the transformational power of literature is clear here: "It took them in at one level and left them at another" (ibid, p. 119). However she reports being shocked by one child's reaction, concluding that "the literature is untamed, but so were their responses" (1995, p. 115). She also highlights an interesting perspective on why teachers might shy away from class discussions linking children's books with their own lives.

*"The personal transaction that occurs is not prescribed; teachers cannot know what will happen when children begin reading and talking about real events, real problems, real episodes from history, spiritual journeys, and reflections....."* (ibid, p. 116).

In one of the few studies of children's response to Holocaust literature, Nicholson (1999) used *Rose Blanche* in a series of "bookshare" sessions with Year 5 and 6 (nine to eleven-year-olds), pointing out that "by glimpsing, from the safe distance of a book, a darker side of life", (Nicholson, 1999, p. 59) children can extend their engagement with the human condition. In relation to writing about the Holocaust, Sokoloff describes herself as "hungry for more evidence about how children react to the books they read" (Sokoloff, 2005, p.

185), and here I would firmly agree. While adults review, ponder and discuss, the real subjects of the works, the children, sometimes get forgotten. More recently, Habib (2008) interrogated reader response after sharing *Refugee Boy* as the set text in a South London Secondary classroom, concluding that the experience had a considerable social, emotional and political impact on her class.

## **1.5 A case study of two books**

As already stated, in order to narrow down the field of refugee children's literature and provide some in-depth analysis, I have decided to focus on two books by well-known authors in the UK, which are commonly used in English classrooms, with contrasting age groups, one for young children and one which bridges the primary/secondary divide. *The Colour of Home* by Mary Hoffman, illustrated by Karin Littlewood, and published by Frances Lincoln in 2002, is aimed at upper Key Stage 1 and lower Key Stage 2 (6 to 9 year olds) and *The Other Side of Truth* by Beverley Naidoo, published by Puffin in 2000, is also available on story-tape and suitable for upper Key Stage 2 and lower Key Stage 3 (10 – 13 year olds). First, I shall give a brief overview of the content, which will obviously be coloured by my own lens as a reader and interpreter of the text, bringing as I do, my personal interests and background knowledge, and opening up the reader response debate as I go. As Rosenblatt pointed out (1938), the reader brings their own world view, memories and needs to each text, and I am no exception.

### **1.5.1 “The Colour of Home”**

*The Colour of Home* is an illustrated, colourful picture book set over 12 spreads, in the traditional format, with text integrated into the illustrations and a clear interaction seen between the two. The text tells the story of Hassan, a Somali boy, who arrives in a classroom in the UK, with very limited English, and feeling disorientated and homesick. However he paints a vivid and colourful picture of his home in Somalia with all his relations, and attendant animals, including his cat, outside. When the picture is complimented by his

teacher, he then paints flames, blood, a gun being fired, and smudges out his uncle from the paper. The illustration of this event is dramatic and bleak, with Hassan's face miserable and desolate. When his mother comes to fetch him, he doesn't want to show her the picture: "He didn't want his mother to be sad" (no page numbers).

The teacher organises for a Somali interpreter to come in, and Hassan explains his picture to them both. Soldiers had come and killed his uncle, among others, while he hid under a bed, terrified (see Figure 2).

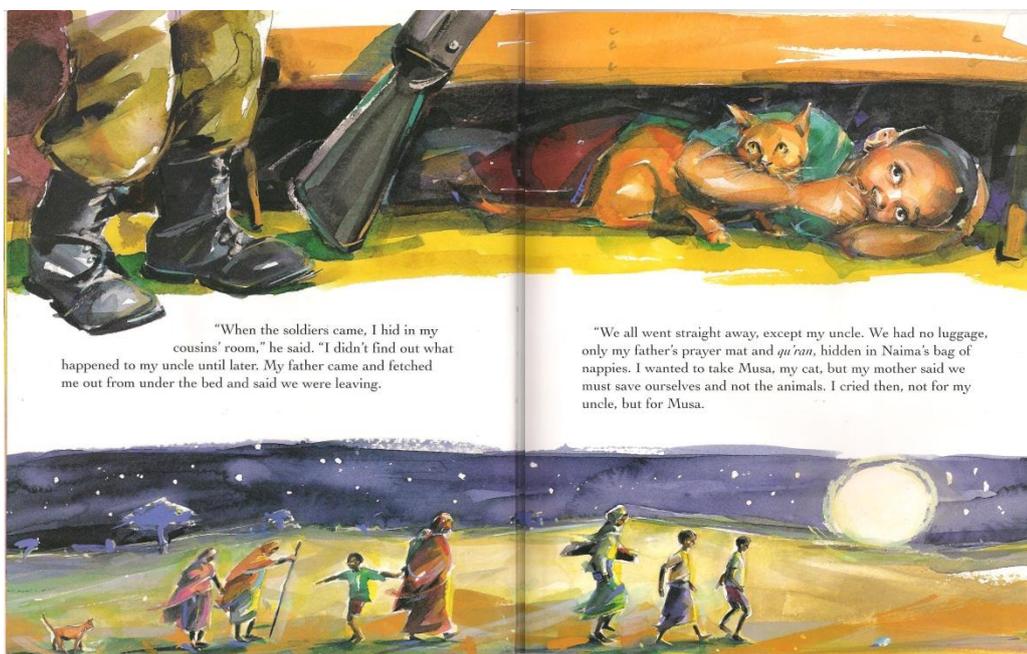


Figure 2: Detail of spread in *The Colour of Home* (Hoffman, 2002)

A graphic picture of the proceedings at this point depicts his fearful situation, but the true horrors are not shown. The family decide to flee, taking a few important things – prayer mat, *qu'ran*—but leaving behind the cat, Musa, whom Hassan mourns more than his uncle. The following pages show the journey to safety, first on foot, then by ship from Mogadishu to Mombasa, where they stayed in a refugee camp, and then, after some time and attendant hardships, on by plane to the UK, where "our new country seemed all cold and grey." After unburdening himself, Hassan goes off to play football with a classmate, and later paints another picture of his home in Somalia, with no people, only animals. This time he shows it proudly to his mother, and on reaching their

new home in the UK, his father pins the picture on the wall. Hassan begins to notice the colours in his new home, the sun comes out, and he asks for another cat using the English word “cat”. In the final sentence he decides: “Tomorrow he would ask Miss Kelly to tell him the word for “home”.”

*The Colour of Home* was published in 2002 by Frances Lincoln, a publishing company well-known for its multicultural perspectives. The book is unusual in that it seeks to represent the refugee experience for the younger age group, and is arguably the first picture book published in the UK on the topic (Hope, 2007). I have introduced this book in many contexts, both in whole school assemblies during Refugee Week, and in my work at Goldsmiths on the ITE course, in the context of English, Geography, Citizenship and Diversity sessions. Furthermore I have found that reading the book with children or student teachers has always engendered lively debate as to its use and appropriateness in a Key Stage One classroom.

### **1.5.2 “The Other Side of Truth”**

*The Other Side of Truth* is a 225 page chapter book, which follows the story of two siblings, Sade (12) and Femi (10), the children of Folarin Solaja, a journalist in Nigeria under General Abacha’s dictatorship. As Folarin leaves the house one Monday morning, having spent the weekend writing an article about the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa (explained fully below), unknown assassins open fire and shoot the children’s mother by mistake. After setting the scene as Lagos, Nigeria, the description of this event is deliberately oblique, and must stand as one of the most dramatic novel-openers of any children’s book to date:

*“Sade is slipping her English book into her schoolbag when Mama screams. Two sharp cracks splinter the air. She hears her father’s fierce cry, rising, falling.*

*‘No! No!’*

*The revving of a car and skidding of tyres smother his voice. Her bag topples from the bed, spilling books, pen and pencil onto the floor. She races to the verandah, pushing past Femi in the doorway. His body is wooden with fright.*

*'Mama mi?' she whispers.*

*Papa is kneeling in the driveway, Mama partly curled up against him. One bare leg stretches out in front of her. His strong hands grip her, trying to halt the growing scarlet monster. But it has already spread down her bright white nurse's uniform. It stains the earth around them.*

*A few seconds, that is all. Later, it will always seem much longer." (Naidoo, 2000, p. 1)*

As the reality of the situation hits home, it is decided that for the children's own safety, they need to be swiftly smuggled out of the country, and sent to their uncle in the UK, with Folarin to follow later.

Sade and Femi accompany Mrs Bankole on a flight to London, posing as her children, but are abandoned by her at Victoria station, where they find themselves virtually penniless, cold and afraid, and try to track down their uncle at "The London College of Art", clearly alluding to Camberwell Art College in South East London. Their uncle is away, and so they are fostered, at first temporarily, and then in a more long-term situation with a Jamaican couple. In attending school they come in to contact with local children, some of whom bully and intimidate them. Sade also meets Mariam, a Somali girl in her class and hears her story of persecution at the hands of President Barre and his regime. Similar to Hassan's story in *The Colour of Home*, Mariam's family had fled on foot and by donkey to Mogadishu and from there by boat to Kenya, where they had stayed in a refugee camp in Mombassa for 6 years, until making the journey to the UK. Meanwhile, Folarin enters the country illegally, but is arrested and detained. The children, desperate to help, manage to gain access to the BBC Newsroom where they are instrumental in publicising their father's story, leading to his release pending an asylum review. The story ends with the children reunited with their father for Christmas, but still facing an uncertain future.

As the author's note at the end (Naidoo, 2000, p. 225) explains, the novel is set in 1995, immediately after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a contemporary Nigerian writer, who was hanged for upholding the rights of the Ogoni people against the corrupt extraction of oil, and accompanying pollution of the area by

foreign multi-nationals. The author's note gives the context to three political figures mentioned: Ken Saro-Wiwa, General Abacha, and President Barre of Somalia. It further explains that Mariam's journey to Mogadishu was over 600 miles in length. Beverley Naidoo deliberately uses "intertextuality", coined as a term by Kristeva (1966) as she interweaves fact with fiction and draws attention to this literary device, leading Pinsent (2005) to state that, while appearing simple in its narrative structure, almost exclusively through the eyes of Sade, it "is in fact a complex tissue of different modes" (ibid, p. 206). *The Other Side of Truth* received several awards including the Carnegie Medal for 2000, the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize Silver Medal in 2000 and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award in 2002, and was named in an International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Honour Book in 2002.

### **1.5.3 Initial comparisons**

The first obvious difference when comparing the two books is that they are addressing two very differing age ranges, *The Colour of Home* being for children of around six to eight or beyond, and *The Other Side of Truth* being aimed at older children of around eleven to thirteen. This is reflected in the ages of the protagonists, and leads to a different treatment of the refugee experience and related issues, suitable to the intended readership, as envisaged by the author. As we can see, *The Colour of Home* is an encapsulation of how a child comes to be a refugee and what might ensue from that point in their lives, using motifs such as the cat and the prayer mat, to convey thoughts and emotions. *The Other Side of Truth* has a more in-depth narrative, due to its length, and deals also with all aspects of the experience, including a tale within a tale, of another and more brutal story which demonstrates the heterogeneity of forced migration, stressed by Rutter (2006).

Another obvious difference is that *The Colour of Home* is a picture book, giving us visual as well as verbal images of the story it tells, described as "the bifurcated nature of the form" by Lewis (1996, p. 270), the illustrations being as important as the narrative, due to the interplay of words and images, with

the pictures offering arguably more depth than the text at times. In Nikolajeva and Scott's terms (2001), *The Colour of Home* would be classified as a "complementary" picture book, in that "the words tell us exactly the same story as the one we can "read" from the pictures" (ibid, p.14), and fill in the gaps left by each other, as opposed to "counterpoint", where the words and pictures might provide different information or conflict with each other. *The Other Side of Truth* contains no pictures, apart from on the cover, and leaves us to imagine far more of the look of the characters, places, scenery and buildings that it describes. In a picture book the background knowledge and perspective of the illustrator is a key part in conveying the story, and crystallising the interpretation to conform to the images in the various pictures.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) reflect on "whose book is it?" (ibid, p. 29), highlighting the difference between author/illustrators, author-illustrator teams who work cooperatively, and authors and illustrators who work separately, as was the case with *The Colour of Home*. They assert that "multiple ownership and multiple intentionality lead to ambiguity and uncertainty in the validity of the interpretation" (ibid). Although Hoffman stated in her interview that she was happy with the work of the illustrator, Karin Littlewood: "She really understood what was wanted and she did a lot of research in local schools", Rutter refers explicitly in her interview to the illustrations in *The Colour of Home* as a problematic factor:

*"I kind of worry a bit about "The Colour of Home" in that it in some ways exoticises refugees and kind of portrays them much more as "The Other" in contrast to Beverley Naidoo's books...I mean, I think partly because it's, it's a picture book and I don't think, I don't think the illustrations relate to kind of reality whereas Beverley Naidoo's books are for older children and they're not illustrated. I mean, "The Colour of Home" is a bit cutesy cutesy in its illustrations..."*

Although Cotton (2000) feels that varied visual narratives can encourage children to empathise with one another and learn about cultural similarities and differences, it could be possible that if not handled appropriately, picture books can become part of a body of literature which creates distance rather than

greater understanding, and it can be the illustrations as much as the text that set the tone.

## **1.6 Reflections**

To set the genre of children's literature about refugees in a wider context, and also to embrace more critical writing about children's books that deal with controversial issues, it is necessary to look further afield to areas such as children's books about war, the Holocaust, and those that deal with race and racism. While reviewing the seminal writing about these genres, and identifying key themes I have hoped to throw additional light on my specific research area, about which little has directly been written. What emerges is a picture showing that "in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century the didactic novel for children began to confront political and social questions very directly" (Grenby, 2008, p. 83), and this has continued to flourish into the 21<sup>st</sup> century too. The following chapter investigates what those questions are in relation to the refugee experience.

## Chapter 2: Addressing the Refugee Experience

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider in detail what is meant by the “refugee experience” and, in particular, how this process impacts on children. I therefore begin with a brief overview of terms and current data with regards to refugees and asylum seekers worldwide, and in the UK, as well as attitudes of the general population and the media, along with government discourses and policy. Theoretical paradigms on the refugee situation are outlined, with a more in-depth consideration of the ecological model in particular, and a brief overview of how the various stages of the experience are reflected in *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth*. Broad refugee agendas are addressed, and finally, opportunities for teaching about refugee issues, particularly using children’s literature, at the time of the study and beyond are discussed.

### 2.2 Who are refugees?

#### 2.2.1 Definitions

As already mentioned, according to the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the technical definition of a “refugee” is someone who has left his/her country and cannot return to it

*“owing to **well-founded fear** of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution...”*  
(UNHCR, 1951, p. 14).

An “asylum seeker” is someone who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded (Refugee Council, n.d.). A further term “internally

displaced person” (IDP) refers to uprooted people displaced within their own country (UNHCR, n.d.), and thus not officially recognised as refugees.

However this official terminology immediately exposes difficulties with legal definitions and the attempted categorisation of a multi-faceted global phenomenon, as a complex picture emerges from all perspectives. Another term “economic migrant” adds an additional layer, defined as “someone who goes to a new country because living conditions or opportunities for jobs are not good in their own country” (Macmillan Dictionary online, n.d.). The description continues... “this word is used by governments to show that a person is not considered a refugee (= someone who has been forced to leave their country for political reasons)” (ibid). Within this statement many assumptions appear to lurk – that the refugee is “deserving” (Sales, 2002) while the economic migrant is not, and that freedom of thought is a more important right than the ability to feed one’s children. The famous social realist play “A View From the Bridge” by Arthur Miller (1955) makes this point fulsomely in its demonstration that for post-war migrants from Sicily to the US, in this instance, the choice could be one of life or death for a dependent family.

Nevertheless, Castles and Loughna (2005) maintain that the category ‘refugee’ is being sidelined in favour of other terms such as asylum seeker, irregular migrant or undocumented migrant, or is subsumed under the asylum–migration nexus. Zetter (2007) writes that “the concept of the ‘refugee’ has come under increasing scrutiny as the causes and consequences of forced migration evolve” (ibid, p. 161), but argues for a continuing discourse which recognises the relevance of the term “refugee” in the contemporary climate of political turbulence. Furthermore the security and permanence of refugee status is now only accorded to the very few, and the process of seeking asylum is prolonged and uncertain, as protection is reviewed every three years (Rutter, 2003). Voutira and Dona (2007) argue that “refugees are becoming an ‘endangered species’, with few individuals being officially recognized under the 1951 Refugee Convention” (ibid, p. 163). As a consequence many asylum seekers have unknown long term prospects and are unable to settle, which

produces high levels of anxiety, affecting psychological well-being of children as well as adults concerned (Hek, 2005).

From these debates emerge a muddy picture, but for the purpose of this study I have used the term “refugees” to refer to both refugees and asylum-seekers, as their situation is very similar, as stated in the introduction. Moreover, as the data to emerge from this study shows, my research also includes responses from children with a refugee background, and children who have migrated themselves, or have a history of migration in their family, as well as those who have none of the above, but have other perspectives to offer. In very real terms, we can see that official and bureaucratic definitions do not include the delicate nuances of people’s lived identities and experiences.

### **2.2.2 Refugee statistics**

In 2013, 232 million people – 3.2 per cent of the world's population – lived outside their country of origin (United Nations Population Fund, 2013), and while the percentage is small, the overall number is huge, giving the impression of a world on the move. Furthermore the number of refugees has grown rapidly in the last decades, the main reasons being political instability, civil wars and conflicts, violation of human rights, and extreme religious tensions (Menter, et al., 2000). By end of 2013, there were 16.7 million refugees, 33.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), and close to 1.2 million asylum-seekers globally. “The 2013 level of displacement was the highest on record since comprehensive statistics on global forced displacement have been collected” (UNHCR, 2014, p. 2). This is due mainly to the ongoing conflict in Syria. The top hosts of refugees were Pakistan, Iran, Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, with developing countries hosting 86% of the world’s refugees (ibid), in stark contrast to a common misconception that most of the world’s refugees try to find sanctuary in the richest nations. The majority of refugees come from, and are taken in by, the poorest countries, and a considerable proportion of that number are children. In 2013, more than half (53%) of all refugees worldwide came from just three countries: Afghanistan,

Syria, and Somalia. Children below 18 years constituted 50 per cent of the refugee population in 2013, the highest figure in a decade (*ibid*, p. 3).

Moreover, in 2013 the UK's 194,000 refugees accounted for 13% of the refugees in Europe (The Migration Observatory, 2014). That year the number of asylum applications in the UK was 23,507, the top producing countries being Pakistan, Iran, Sri Lanka, Syria, Eritrea, Albania, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, India, and Nigeria, with 63% of initial decisions being refusals (The Refugee Council, 2014, pp. 1-2). A large proportion of people do not get a favourable decision initially, but have to go to appeal, relying on the use of immigration specialist lawyers, and requiring documentary evidence, and good spoken English, if possible. Applicants have to prove that they have a "well-founded fear" of persecution if they were repatriated, and the most common reason for refusal is incorrect completion of paperwork (Hyder, 2005) (Rutter, 2006). Richman (1998) points out that for people who have fled in fear, gathering useful documents for evidence later, even if they possess them, can be impossible, or very far from their minds.

Calculating the number of refugee children in the UK is much more problematic. The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) requires schools to submit returns detailing the number of refugees prior to inspection, and the annual pupil census also asks for such information (Rutter, 2003), but obviously asking children or their parents direct questions about their immigration status is not possible. Back in 2003, the Refugee Council estimated that there were almost 99,000 refugee children of compulsory school age (Naldic, n.d.). It was estimated that about 4.5% of the school population in Greater London were refugee children, the highest concentration in the country, and a figure worthy of attention (Rutter, 2003). In 2013 there were 5,888 asylum applications in the UK from dependants, the majority of being under the age of 18 (The Refugee Council, 2014, p. 10). We can see therefore that teachers and pupils in UK schools, and particularly in London, are likely to encounter refugee children, or may be refugees themselves.

### 2.2.3 Attitudes and policy towards refugees

Negative discourses concerning refugees and asylum seekers are frequently voiced in the tabloid press, constructing them socially and politically as “other” (Ahmed, 2000), and media scapegoating of “bogus illegals” can incite hostility, racism and even violence. Perceptions such as these percolate down to children in UK classrooms, through the family environment, newspapers and television reportage. Meanwhile teachers are expected to safeguard the wellbeing of refugees and asylum seeker children, while often encountering lack of understanding, and even hostile attitudes on occasion. This perception of refugees and asylum seekers does not, however, derive only from the media. Rutter (2003) and (2005) charts how government policy has taken an increasingly negative stance towards refugees and asylum seekers in recent years, in response to public opinion arguably shaped by the media, and reacting to calls for a reduction in numbers of migrants to Britain.

*“From the mid – 1980s onwards European and British asylum policy has converged and moved towards a course of action where greater and greater hurdles have been put in front of the would-be asylum-seeker: fortress Europe has emerged.” (Rutter, 2003, p. 20)*

A common misconception that Britain is a “soft touch” for refugees was highlighted in an Ipsos MORI poll (2002), where respondents thought that on average 23% of the world’s refugees and asylum seekers were in the UK. In contrast figures show that the UK hosts less than 2%, but the former discourse dominates. In relation to asylum requests in Europe, the UK ranks 13th when relating application to population size (ICAR, 2009, p. 16), again countering common perceptions that Britain takes far more than its fair share of refugees on the European stage. Lack of knowledge about refugee facts and figures is also endemic in the teaching profession, though little researched. A study of ITE trainees’ attitudes to the teaching of refugee issues uncovered that 35% of student teachers in an inner London college thought that government policy on asylum was “too lenient” and 73% were surprised by statistics when presented to them in a college session (Hope, 2008)

Thus misconceptions about refugees still persist, with The Migration Observatory (2011) reporting on a poll of public perception of immigrants:

*“When thinking about immigrants, respondents were most likely to think of asylum seekers (62%) and least likely to think of students (29%). In current official (ONS) statistics, students represent the largest group of immigrants coming to the UK (37% of 2009 immigrant arrivals) while asylum seekers are the smallest group (4% in 2009).”* (ibid, p. 3)

A recent investigation into the reporting of refugees and asylum seekers in the media found that although that much media reporting was “sensationalist and inaccurate” (ICAR, 2012), new media meant that “citizen journalism” (ibid, n.p), might counter this trend. Furthermore a Refugee Council briefing (2013) found that while the popular press carried stories regarding asylum seekers who had committed crimes in the UK, were receiving benefits, or living in ‘luxury’ housing,

*“very few made any reference to the reasons people fled, or the difficulties many face when they arrive in the UK”* (ibid, p. 7).

Meanwhile liberal-leaning broadsheets showed articles highlighting these points, a balance that was seen as extremely important. Recently the debate has focussed more on European migrants from the new accession states, a position that the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is turning into political capital to petition for stricter immigration controls and an exit from the European Union, especially during the recent UK general election (UKIP, 2015). However with an international humanitarian refugee crisis developing in the Middle East after the Iraqi invasion in 2003, the ongoing wars in Gaza, and the spiralling civil war in Syria, mass movements of refugees are reaching ever larger proportions (European Council on Foreign Relations, 2015). In Europe debate focusses on the increasing number of migrants trying to enter by boat, with daily news of mass drownings at sea, and rescue responsibilities becoming another political issue (Kingsley, et al., 2015). All this is discussed round the clock on radio, television and in newspapers, and is thus readily accessible to children of all ages throughout the UK.

## **2.3 *Theorising the refugee situation***

### **2.3.1 Migration and the refugee experience**

Since the 1990s, the term “forced migration” is increasingly used to avoid a refugee/non-refugee binary and researchers such as Richmond (1993) have gone further to suggest that there is a blurred boundary between forced and voluntary migration, preferring a continuum between proactive and reactive migration. He also identified other variables in the process, such as “push” and “pull” factors, enabling circumstances (for example social networks), and structural constraints (for example, immigration controls). Furthermore Zetter (1991) emphasized the extreme vulnerability of refugees to imposed bureaucratic labels, and their powerlessness in the process. However the need for legal distinction is of vital importance in accessing entitlement and for this reason refugee agencies are understandably reluctant to acknowledge that asylum-migration might operate as a continuum, as this would lead to a dilution of commitments to refugees (Rutter, 2006) (Morrice, 2011).

### **2.3.2 Trauma v.s resilience discourses**

Trauma theory dates back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ringel & Brandell, 2011), trauma being seen as “the results of having endured unbearable experiences” (van der Kolk, et al., 1996, p. 50). During World War II, a still-ongoing dilemma was recognised as to whether it was best to bring traumatic memories to the fore, or focus on stabilisation (Kardiner, 1941). In 1994, Rutter wrote that the experience of refugee children “can be summarised as a culmination of loss, trauma and change” (1994, p. 89). Some writers examine the trauma that refugee children may have experienced, detailing the nature of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Yule, 1998) (Fazel & Stein, 2002), although it is fairly rare for children to suffer such symptoms, and for an extended period of time. Fazel and Stein detailed “three stages of traumatic experiences (1) while in their country of origin; (2) during their flight to safety; and (3) when having to settle in a country of refuge” (ibid, p. 366). Recent studies show that early childhood trauma can result in poor impulse control, aggression, difficulty with interpersonal relationships and poor academic

performance (van der Kolk, 2005). Nial (2005) states, when talking about teaching refugees and asylum seekers in an adolescent psychiatric unit:

*“It is common for traumatised young people who have experienced loss – loss of family and friends, loss of country, of culture and of their way of life – to reach out in hope to the future, to embrace wholeheartedly the prospect of a new life and the acquisition of a new language. Although this is admirable, it can too often be an attempt to block out the past. This is highly unlikely to be successful if the past is not given its weight, if feelings and emotions are not given their due, if grieving does not occur, if loss is not experienced or acknowledged.”*(ibid, p. 33)

Recent studies have focussed on the importance of building up trust prior to treatment, and a mixed approach of cognitive behaviour therapy, testimonial psychotherapy and narrative exposure therapy (Ehnholt & Yule, 2006). However Gangi and Barowsky (2009) suggest that these methods might run the risk of “re-traumatizing” the child, and advocate nonverbal modalities, such as dance, music, art (as with Hassan’s picture in *The Colour of Home*) and verbal but distanced entreés such literature, writing and story-telling as potentially providing catharsis. Meanwhile Rutter (2006) now asserts that the “traumatisation” of the refugee situation has dominated research to the extent that it has presumed homogeneity amongst refugee children, an assumption which needs to be broken down. She notes:

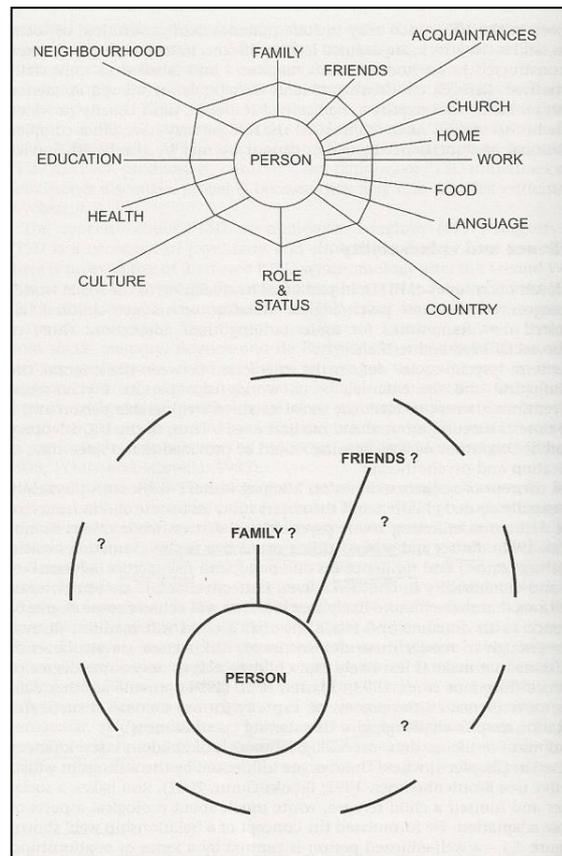
*“their construction as ‘traumatised’ impeded a real analysis of their backgrounds and experiences as well as masking the significance of post-migration experiences such as poverty, isolation, racism and uncertain immigration status”* (ibid, p. 5)

Using discourse analysis Rutter (ibid) found that a humanitarian focus on trauma and pity is frequent among teachers, laying the blame for all refugee children’s problems on pre-migration situations, and thus relieving themselves of responsibility for becoming advocates for better resources, and higher quality educational experiences for those in their care. However Pinson et al. (2010) pointed to a compassionate professionalism amongst teachers, many of whom are not afraid to challenge the forcible removal and deportation of children and families.

Other refugee commentators (Richman, 1998) (Hamilton & Moore, 2004) discuss the risk and protective factors in refugee children's experiences, contrasting resilience (Rutter, 1985) (Masten, et al., 1991) to vulnerability and finding plenty of the former in most refugee children's approach to life. Losel (1994) identified certain "protective factors" in resilient children's lives, which could shield them from the worst effects of stress. These, summarised by Tolfree (1996, pp. 23-24) were: a stable emotional relationship, social support, a positive educational climate, role models, social responsibilities and achievement demands, cognitive competence, self-esteem, an active coping style, and a sense of structure and meaning. Family is the most important component in any child's life, and if stable and positive family relationships are maintained, children can prove very resilient. In fact children evacuated away from their families in the UK in WW2, suffered more stress than those who stayed in heavily bombed areas with their families around them (Freud & Burlingham, 1943). Resilience research is still a highly active field, and is being extended to many areas of children and family studies, with major thinkers such as Ungar (2013) maintaining that the relationship between resilience and environment is crucial to protect against the negative impact of exposure to traumatic events. Throughout any analysis of the refugee experience, therefore, it is important to maintain a balanced view of the risk and protective factors present at any part of the process, and to move away from a "trauma agenda" which blinds us to the positive aspects that may be part of the migrating child's life.

### **2.3.3 Ecological approaches**

Baker (1983), himself a refugee, formulated the concept of a 'relationship web' shown in Figure 3, to highlight challenges that refugees face in reconstructing their lives and adapting to a new setting. The first diagram represents the series of relationships surrounding a person in a secure situation, whereas the second diagram demonstrates a web that needs reconstructing and anchoring, perhaps in the case of a refugee child.

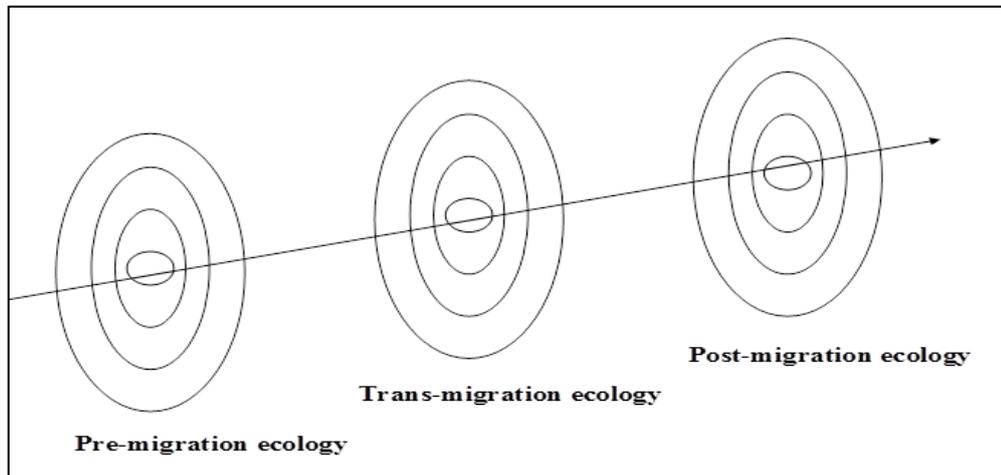


**Figure 3: Relationship webs. (Baker, 1983)**

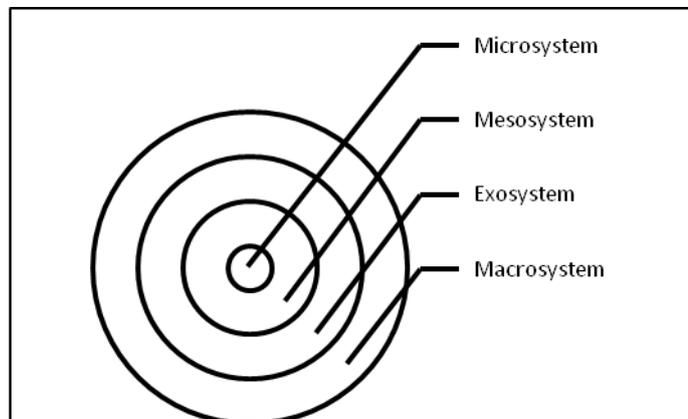
Developing the ecological approach further, Hamilton and Moore (2004), in New Zealand, divide the refugee experience into three distinct contexts (see Figure 4), similar to Fazel and Stein’s (2002) three stages, mentioned above, pre-migration factors, which includes characteristics and experiences of refugees that occurred prior to leaving the home country, trans-migration factors which occurred in the transition from home to host country (could be short or long in duration, depending on circumstances), and post-migration factors which occur on arrival in the host country.

They argue that this model can be used to provide snapshots of the different ecologies that refugees find themselves in, during which dramatic tensions can arise due to “atypical” conditions (ibid, 8). These can be passive, in that the child may be lacking access to education or health care, or active, for example exposure to violence and deprivation. This theory operates not only in a linear time-bound direction, but also as a cross-section of influences on the child at

any given time (depicted by the concentric circles in Figures 4 and 5), using the developmental psychologist Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development (1979) which illustrates the importance of the context or environment on the individual.



**Figure 4: Model of refugee adaptation and development. Hamilton and Moore (2004)**



**Figure 5: Diagram of Bronfenbrenner's Ecologies (1979)**

In exploring how human beings progress through and accommodate within their immediate settings, and the larger contexts within which those settings are located, Bronfenbrenner identifies various systems, a microsystem , mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem (see Figure 6).

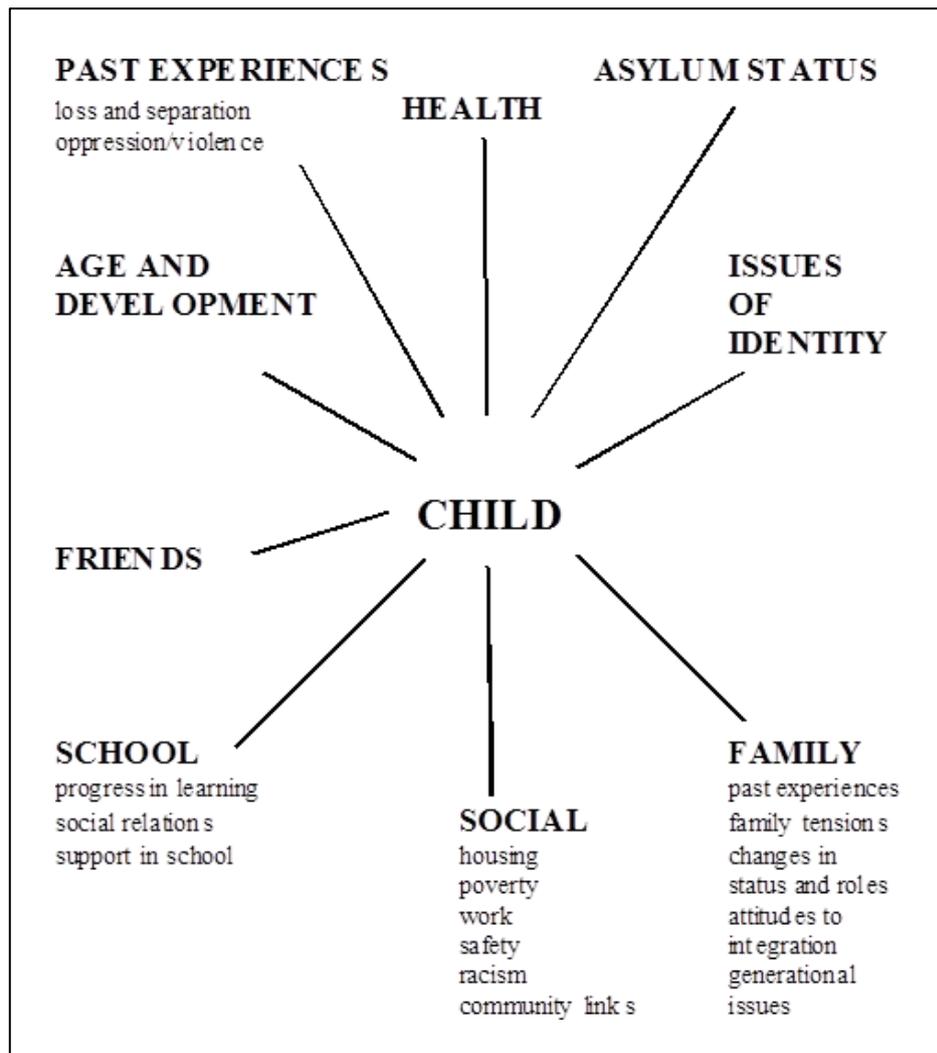
microsystem	relations between the child and their immediate family, neighbours, peers, etc.
mesosystem	relationships between microsystems, e.g. between home and school, and school and workplace
exosystem	relationships between more distant systems at least one of which the child is not necessarily involved in e.g. between home and parent's work place
macrosystem	the broad ideology, laws and customs of society, and features such as a given country's education system

**Figure 6: Bronfenbrenner's ecologies, as defined by Hamilton and Moore (2004)**

Two trajectories of this theoretical framework are that of the principle of reciprocity (that the individual is shaped by, but also shapes his or her environment) and that the environment is not a single setting, but an interlinking network of ever larger spheres of influence. Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues that the most important contribution to a child's wellbeing is the set of links between the microsystem and the mesosystem. Where there are more links and the stronger these links, the better the child's experience and outcomes are likely to be.

However Stewart (2011) in using the same model extensively from a Canadian perspective, to provide strategies for educators supporting refugee children, suggests that evidence provided by students' stories shows that the three ecologies are "much less defined than originally assumed" (ibid, p. 52). In some cases there were still close connections to friends and family living in the country of origin. Others have contact with those suspended in the trans-migration phase, and memories of past violence which continue to haunt them, or are still struggling to cope with loss. Thus the distinct stages become blurred, and it takes time for school staff to piece together limited information about the pre- and trans-migration experiences, demonstrating how past experiences still affect current lives. Watters (2008) argues that although past

events are important, services should be aimed at the “here and now” as a useful starting point, and that young people, while being caught up in adverse circumstances, are “resourceful and capable in exercising agency” (ibid, p. 187). Thus Richman’s (1998) summary (see Figure 7) is helpful as an overview of the wide range of interacting factors, both past and current, that affect refugee children's well-being.



**Figure 7: Factors that affect refugee children's well-being. Richman (1998)**

## **2.4 Tracking the refugee experience**

### **2.4.1 Pre-migration ecologies**

McDonald (1998), Richman (1998) and Rutter (2003) point out that refugee children may have come from various countries, differing class, ethnic and linguistic groups, families with different religious observances and sometimes conflicting political affiliations, as well as a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds. The stereotypical view of a rural origin, is very often not the case, and refugee children may well come from predominantly urban environments. They may also have been extremely wealthy prior to flight.

*“Those who have fled the world’s poorest countries are primarily the urban middle class” (Rutter, 1998, p. 24).*

Parents may have had high-powered jobs in the country of origin, which made them a target for hostility. They may have been well-educated, and have often made the decision to flee with their children’s welfare very much in mind. Refugee children may have lived amongst a large extended family, or been part of a small nuclear family and educational experiences can also be very varied.

Children’s understanding and experience of the reasons for fleeing persecution can also differ widely (Rutter, 1998) (2003). Some children will have fled from their houses at a minute’s notice, in which case everyday belongings, objects of sentimental value, such as photos, and important documents like birth certificates, may have been left behind (Richman, 1998). Some children may have been in hiding for long periods of time. Other children will have been exposed to horrific acts of violence, both on themselves and also enacted on family members (Yule, 1998) (Menter, et al., 2000). Some will have experienced torture or genocide (Rutter, 2003). Hyder (2005) points out that modern warfare has changed so much in character that in today’s conflicts almost 85 - 90% of casualties are civilians, and this has huge implications for children’s experience of war. Some refugee children may have even been involved in perpetrating atrocities themselves, as the use of child soldiers becomes more and more commonplace. The decision to leave

may have been a long process, debated and discussed in secret, and with no involvement of children in the planning and execution, or it may have been a spur of the moment action, without prior warning, arguably more difficult to cope with in the long term (Rutter, 1998) (2003) (Menter, et al., 2000). Complicated, lengthy plans to obtain false passports, or the decision to send sections of the family, for example the father, off in an advance guard, may not have been shared with children, and as such they will have been saved some of the anxiety at the start of the experience they will undergo (Hyder, 2005).

Although *The Colour of Home* starts in the post-migration stage, the first paragraph tells the reader that Hassan is from Somalia. As such it avoids homogenisation of the refugee experience from the outset, criticised by Rutter (2006), and is useful in locating the pre-migration ecology, as previously argued. Although depicted in a possibly romanticised flash-back, the rural home in Hassan's story is poor and overcrowded, and it is questionable whether refugees arriving in the UK would have come from such humble origins, the journey being long and requiring considerable resources, as discussed above. What is also missing from the book, but mentioned in the early drafts, made available to me by Hoffman, is a snapshot of the family networking with other Somalis and attending a mosque, eating snacks and the mother making a cushion. I would suggest this picture provides a positive context of pre-migration relationship webs (Baker, 1983) amongst refugees' own community, which would serve to provide a more well-rounded vision for children to relate to. However where *The Colour of Home* is clear and hard-hitting is in its treatment of the reasons for flight, as already shown in Chapter 1. This signals an unquestionably "well-founded fear", that would lead to taking flight, and is useful as such, although the intensity of the violence has stimulated a possibly "well-founded fear" by teachers of introducing such strong images to a young age group, a discussion which will be continued throughout the study.

In contrast, *The Other Side of Truth* starts in the pre-migration ecology, although it is also constantly alluded to via flash-backs throughout the book, Naidoo being adept at weaving together details of the children's life in Nigeria,

full of cultural allusions and references, as her protagonists deal with the present circumstances of their situation. The dramatic and violent opening, already quoted, leads Pinsent (2005) to describe it as “one of the most hard-hitting children’s novels dealing with the plight of asylum seeker” (ibid, p. 204). Again this makes clear the context and reasons for flight. However the passage also mentions Sade packing her school bag, including her English book. As (Giles, 2009) notes:

*“Any expectations that readers might have that all Africans are impoverished are dispelled by the English book, which signals the fact that Sade and her family are members of Nigeria’s professional middle class.....These African children are trilingual, unlike their British counterparts, and in many ways better educated and disciplined”* (ibid, p. 348).

Furthermore the occupations of both parents are clearly explained, Mama working as a nurse and Papa as an outspoken journalist on a weekly English language newspaper called “Speak”. As such, both parents had well-paid jobs and this is reflected in the standard of living of the family, as they have a car, a servant, and a large house with a driver. In contrast to *The Colour of Home*, the family would clearly have the means to fly the children to England, paying for a people smuggler to take them. This more realistic portrayal of the refugee situation could be attributed to the fact that Naidoo started from a different perspective; that of personal connections and political influences, discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

#### **2.4.2 Trans-migration ecologies**

Children’s experiences of journeys to safety may have been traumatic. Yule (1998) and Hyder (2005) observe that they may have travelled long distances lasting days or months, in cramped conditions, having to keep quiet for considerable stretches of time, and may have been sedated to help them cope. Families may be travelling on forged passports which involved children in risky deception, or they may be “helped” by traffickers, in return for large sums of money, who are impatient of children’s needs and even abusive in their behaviour (Rutter, 2003) (Hyder, 2005). Asylum seekers may have had

extended periods of time staying in refugee camps (Yule, 1998), which may be very cold, or very hot, dirty, cramped and dangerous. In such places the risk of sexual violence towards women and children is very high, especially when gathering water or firewood.

One of the greatest stressors is the uncertainty and lack of information regarding the length of time to be spent in uncomfortable and unsuitable surroundings. This factor can cause physical and mental health problems in itself, as waiting indefinitely takes its toll (Rutter, 2003). Children can often become the props that adults unwittingly lean on, particularly older children who are expected to look after younger siblings, or support single parents, often women, to cope in such difficult circumstances. Conversely, children may not have been part of such dramatic events and may have simply boarded a plane to be met by a close family member at the other end of their journey.

Even though *The Colour of Home* is for very young children, attention to detail is clear throughout. An example of this is in the treatment of Hassan's journey, with details of living in a refugee camp in Mombassa, including queuing for food, a reference to the thefts that occur in such situations, especially of gold, which is often carried and sold as a means to freedom, and the necessity of leaving behind some family members. However, earlier drafts made available to me by Hoffman demonstrate a general "watering down" of the more traumatic detail originally included, such as sleeping in a tent with another family, bad food, cold and sadness. Similarly riding on a cart and praying at the side of the road was left out, but country and city place names are given, and modes of transport used, which adds realism and helps the reader imagine the journey to safety step by step, even tracing it on a map if they wish to do so. Thus, in three pages containing very little text, the author has managed to convey in very condensed form the trans-migration ecologies that impact on a child in flight.

*The Other Side of Truth* contains two contrasting visions of the trans-migration experience, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The journey of Sade and Femi from

Nigeria to England takes more than 20 pages and is an important part of the structure of the novel. It is unusual in that it deals with very young unaccompanied asylum-seeker children being smuggled from one country to another. This heightens the drama of *The Other Side of Truth* and adds considerably to the potential danger for the children. It also introduces young readers to the concept of people smuggling, demonstrating that there are those who are prepared to exploit others in vulnerable situations, without concern for their welfare. Furthermore it plays on the meaning of the title *The Other Side of Truth*, the children being suddenly exposed to the idea that there are times when telling the truth has to be put to one side and is thus “the novel's central moral conflict” (Giles, 2009, p. 347). The actual journey that Sade and Femi make is described in Naidoo's archetypal style, rich in description and feeling, told through the thoughts of Sade, and mingling present pictures with past thoughts, dreams and flashbacks, bringing the pre- and trans-migration experience together to interact, with vivid realism.

As already mentioned in Chapter 1, Naidoo also includes the story of Miriam, a classmate of Sade's, who had to escape Somalia in much the same way as Hassan in *The Colour of Home*. It is a hard-hitting and poignant story, covering 4 pages, which involves the capture of Miriam's father by soldiers, the bombing of Hargeisa, where the family lived, by President Barre's forces, and a long journey, by foot and donkey to Mogadishu, including her mother suffering a miscarriage on the way. From there they took a small, overcrowded boat to Mombassa, where they stayed in a refugee camp for six years, until an uncle in the UK came to fetch them. The Author's Note (Naidoo, 2000, p. 225) explains the political context briefly and informs readers that Miriam's journey was over 600 miles in length. As such, this short account provides a contrast to the story of Femi and Sade's flight, to show the potential diversity of experiences in the trans-migration phase, and furthermore the related “experience of the formerly colonised... emphasizing global interconnectedness” (Giles, 2009, p. 344).

### 2.4.3 Post-migration ecologies

On arrival, asylum seekers can face frightening situations, in which children are participants, and this can lead to further trauma after a potentially gruelling journey. The safety that refugees envisage is not always immediately forthcoming, with some claimants enduring long waits in inhospitable surroundings, and interrogation of a very close and sometimes threatening nature, when they are tired and confused.

*“The process of making a claim for asylum, waiting for the Home Office decision and, if refused, making an appeal, often takes an extremely long time, possibly several years, during which the refugees remain uncertain of their fate” (Richman, 1998, p. 9).*

If children are unaccompanied by their parents or carers, they will have to deal with these difficult situations by themselves, which can add greatly to their distress (Richman, 1998).

Once accepted into the country, the process is far from complete. Putting in a claim involves using lawyers, who are expensive and sometimes ineffectual. Compiling the evidence can be difficult and, as previously noted, lack of documentary evidence is commonplace. The onus is on the claimant to prove the case and in recent years “a culture of disbelief” (Richman, 1998) has prevailed and facing deportation back to a country where persecution is ongoing is not a comfortable prospect. Even when sanctuary is achieved, it may be only a temporary form of protection, contributing further to refugees’ feelings of insecurity. Baker (1983) points out that the initial settlement and adaption of refugees can take several years, but that the unresolved residual effects of having had the experience may continue to affect the person for the rest of their life, known as “survivors’ syndrome”.

Both *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* deal mainly with the problems associated with settling in a new country and here *The Colour of Home* engages well with questions of conflicting cultures, especially in terms of schooling, reference to different food, language barriers, and feelings of

isolation. It does not choose to address potential racism towards the new arrival, but instead depicts the other children as welcoming and friendly, struggling to connect with Hassan. Again, this is not always the lived experience of many refugee and asylum-seeker children, but perhaps the target audience was deemed too young to be presented with these awkward issues, or perhaps again, the book is too short to encompass all aspects noted previously. As unaccompanied asylum-seekers, the children in *The Other Side of Truth* have to deal with the asylum process on arrival in the UK, and come up against the systems of passport control and customs searches, which take on a very different ambiance for those attempting illegal immigration. Cornell (2010) makes the point that in compiling a list of children's picture books that dealt with immigration issues it was noticeable that very few addressed issues of documentation and access to citizenship. In *The Other Side of Truth* we are also given very definite locations in real-life London that the children navigate through in the start of their post-migration ecology, adding authenticity to the story. Sade and Femi encounter many trials and tribulations as they try to orientate themselves in the UK, starting with basic needs such as food and shelter, leading them to temporary fostering, and then a more long-term arrangement. Once this is achieved, and not without difficulty, they are faced with hostility and aggression from children in the host community, having to confront friendship and moral issues without their parent's protection.

## **2.5 Wider refugee agendas**

### **2.5.1 Questions of identity**

Refugees often lack stability and security on arrival and if they have left at short notice they can arrive feeling disorientated and bewildered (Menter, et al., 2000). On arrival, they may well suffer from crises of identity and self-confidence. They are unable to interact satisfactorily with others because of language barriers, and their previous biography is unknown or does not translate. Children may be unable to share their experiences with others for fear of negative reactions, and may possibly have a distrust of adults (ibid).

*“Becoming a refugee presents both adults and children with questions about who they are and where they belong, because they have lost the surety of their place in the world” (Richman, 1998, p. 31).*

Many studies have been made into the construction of identity, and this is particularly important with refugees and migrants as it is often a struggle to develop a new identity in an adopted country. Giddens (1991) states that ‘self-identity’ is

*“the self as reflexively understood by the individual in terms of his or her biography” (ibid, p. 53).*

Forced or sudden migration, in particular, interrupts the developing biography of the individual, by abruptly cutting through all previous experience and characteristically causing confusion and dislocation. Sometimes children try to “blank out” their previous life, as the memory of it is too painful, and parents may not choose to talk about the past for the same reason.

Also relevant are the theories of Hall (1992), who writes that ethnic and personal identity is shifting as a result of globalisation. As the world is increasingly interconnected, becoming more a single economic, social and cultural entity, concepts of personal and national identity are changing. With greater migration, there is a development of new “hybrid” identities (Bhabha, 1994), by people who have spent time in different countries, refugees being part of this phenomenon. In this way people in exile experience an altered identity which may have influences from their past and present situations mixed in differing degrees.

*“Understanding identity is important for those working with refugee children. They need to know how refugee children construct new identities in exile, as a means of coping with their new life” (Rutter, 2003, p. 75).*

## 2.5.2 Culture and Assimilation

What separates refugees from other migrants in official terms is that they have been forced to leave their country of origin, rather than choosing to do so, although as previously discussed, the boundaries may well become blurred between the two. Whatever their bureaucratic status, refugees and migrants may suffer more grief over the loss of their home culture if forced to relocate due to overwhelming “push” factors, than if they have had more of a choice to leave it behind.

*“The loss of the familiar culture with all its richness of customs, rituals, and relationships has been likened to cultural bereavement” (Richman, 1998).*

Also part of the refugee experience is the notion that those seeking asylum may also one day want to return to their home country, being still very attached to it, and having many friends and family left behind (Hyder, 2005). This may cause refugee families to cling to their home culture more fervently than some other migrants, who may move forward and embrace new mores with greater enthusiasm. The need to find others with similar viewpoints and lifestyles will be crucial in maintaining well-being, and children will often be expected to embrace new found communities from their own cultural backgrounds with an enthusiasm that they might not share with their parents, (Richman, 1998). For other young people events and celebrations organised by their cultural community in exile will be their life-blood, and sustain them in their battle to readjust to their new circumstances.

Other cultural problems can arise from generational differences, and Richman (1998) notes that children in exile may often develop ‘bicultural’ identities (ibid, p. 34), valuing aspects of both the past and present cultures. This may happen much more quickly for children than parents, causing strife in family relationships, or may differ in nature between one sibling and another, causing yet more tension. Furthermore parents may underestimate the value of imparting aspects of the home culture, for children to appreciate, understand and enjoy, and use to construct their own identity as they grow up (Richman,

1998). A project in Tower Hamlets which brought Somali parents into school to talk about their past and childhood, resulted in a much greater interest in Somali culture in the home and also served as a catalyst for parents to take their children on trips back to Somalia to meet their extended family and discover their heritage<sup>2</sup>.

In the USA, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) developed a theory known as “segmented assimilation” (ibid, p.44), suggesting that children of migrant and refugee families adapt to the cultural norms of the mainstream differentially, depending of the attitudes and values of their own culture. Some groups assimilated into the social practice of white middle-class America, others maintained home cultures, minimising integration, but retaining a strong pro-work, pro-education ethic, while a third group adopted the cultural forms of the American underclass, with all their attendant problems. This suggests that questions of cultural adjustment are more related to regional practices prior to arrival, rather than the differential immigration status of various groups. However Piper et al., (2013) writing from an Australian perspective, are harshly critical of those countries who consider the “integration potential” of individuals and groups in their resettlement process. As they clearly state, “excluding those most in need of protection for the sole reason that they “might not fit in” undermines the integrity of the program and places lives at risk” (ibid, p. 23).

### **2.5.3 Language barriers and racism**

Children rapidly acquire a new language, especially when well-integrated into the school routines, but the effect that initial communication problems may have on the long term self-esteem of refugee children is undocumented. We are made aware of the importance of the interaction between language and identity by the work of Vygotsky (1962), who saw that individual

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<sup>2</sup> Workshop entitled “When you lived in Somalia” by Rachel Warner and Mohammed Barre, Identity and Belonging Conference, Humanities Association, London, 09.03.07

consciousness is built from outside through relations with others, and that words play a central part not only in the development of thought but in the growth of consciousness as a whole. In terms of self-confidence and sense of identity, acquisition of the dominant language of the host country is essential for newcomers (Cameron, 2000). If interaction with those around is not easy, sense of identity and status are heavily affected.

Richman (1995) reported that 19 out of the 33 refugee and asylum seeker children she interviewed had experienced racism and bullying, and 6 of these had changed schools or were planning to do so. Similarly, Save the Children (1997) found that half of the children in their study of young refugees from the Horn of Africa reported bullying, and 25% felt that they had been the targets of racism. They were most commonly referred to as “scroungers”. Rainey et al. (1997) found that young adults without any social contact with refugees displayed superficial sympathy but no identification with refugees’ backgrounds and situations, these being seen as belonging to another world, allowing media stereotypes to take hold. Hyder (2005) notes that terms such as ‘beggars’, ‘scroungers’ and ‘bogus’ are frequently used by parts of the UK media when referring to asylum seekers in particular. She observes that some negative press coverage has an impact on children and families, with evidence of even very young children being abusive to refugee and asylum-seeking peers.

#### **2.5.4 Education**

Some refugee children and new arrivals may not have attended school at all, while others may have attended English medium schools in their home countries, or had a high level of education in another language and educational system (Rutter, 1998) (2003), again highlighting very different pre-migration experiences. As already stated, acquisition of English is a priority for refugee children in order to make friends, but also to access the curriculum, although McDonald (1998) found that EAL provision was patchy across the country, and this inhibited integration. Menter et al. (2000) observed, however, that children rapidly develop new expertise, including language and

communication skills. As a result they obtain a tool that can shift the balance of power between them and their parents. The parents feel that they are no longer in control because they do not know the education system and they do not speak the language so they cannot liaise directly with school authorities. Menter (ibid) therefore stresses that use of the home language should be preserved wherever possible, even in school, in order to communicate with parents and maintain identity.

Tolfree (1996) noted that, after family, attending school in the host country has the greatest capacity for supporting refugee children. Tolfree (ibid) and Hyder (2005) also focus on the healing nature of “play” for children affected by war and conflict, with Early Years provision in school being well able to meet those needs. While giving structure and purpose, schools can also provide psychosocial care on an informal basis,

*“a situation in which young people can talk about shared experiences and integrate the meaning of events into their view of themselves and their world”* (Tolfree, 1996, p. 58).

As Bolloten & Spafford (1998) note, schools have the potential to welcome and absorb asylum seekers and normalise the refugee situation. Fazel and Stein (2002) also argue that primary prevention of deteriorating mental health of refugee children can be best undertaken in the school context.

However the situation is not always supported by adequate funding. Rutter (2006) charts the development of support for refugee children in the UK, originally subsumed under Section 11 of the Local Government Act of 1966, which was set up to help schools meet the particular needs of children arriving from the “new Commonwealth”. In the 1990s London schools began to earmark funds specifically for refugee support teachers, and in 1993 the Section 11 remit was expanded to cover all ethnic minorities. In 1999, this was replaced by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Grant (EMAG) which was intended to widen the scope from mainly English as an Additional Language (EAL) teaching to raising standards for all minority ethnic groups at risk of

under-achieving, and refugee children being part of the target. However with the devolution of funding into school budgets and the demise of local education authorities, subsequent initiatives such as the Vulnerable Children's Grant (2002) have been lacking a holistic view of refugee children's support across the country, and have been allocated where there are "vocal refugee advocates" (Rutter, 2006, p. 123). In 2005 it was found that there were no specific funding arrangements to support asylum seeker and refugee children, and that Ofsted argued that their needs were best addressed "through mainstream approaches to inclusion and racial equality" (Arnot & Pinson, 2005, p. 5).

Beyond the UK, Alba and Holdaway (2013) have made a comparative study of the children of low-status immigrant groups in France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the US, to see how their achievement compared to mainstream populations. They found that across the board educational processes play a part in creating unequal status for the next generation in these societies, and identified the factors which contributed to this in different contexts, as well as positive initiatives that could be usefully applied elsewhere.

## **2.6 *Teaching about refugee issues***

### **2.6.1 Education policy**

The National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999) non-statutory guidance for PSHE and Citizenship did not expressly mention teaching about refugee issues, but there were many references that could justify its inclusion in the primary curriculum, for example, "to research, discuss and debate topical issues, problems and events" or "to reflect on spiritual, moral, social, and cultural issues, using imagination to understand other people's experiences" (ibid, p.139). Furthermore, DfES guidelines *Aiming High: Guidance on Supporting the Education of Asylum Seeking and Refugee Children* (2004) recommended "Schools can use the curriculum to raise awareness about asylum seekers and refugees in a way that stresses their

humanity - the arts in particular offer many opportunities” (DfES, 2004, p. 13). Indeed the QCA suggested in its scheme of work for Citizenship at Key stages 1 and 2, the inclusion of a unit on Children’s Rights and Human Rights which would look at “situations where children’s rights have been denied, in this country and overseas, ....e.g. refugee children” (DfCSF, n.d.).

The Every Child Matters agenda, part of the Children Act 2004, but now superseded, had as its cornerstone the need to include and value the background of every child in the school setting. With it came a growth of Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) which pointed increasingly to a further, more controversial area – the role of teachers in developing attitudes and values within their students for the good of the individual and society as a whole. This was echoed in the more recent Duty to Promote Community Cohesion, with its declaration “Schools have a duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity and good relations between people of different groups” (DfCSF, 2007, p. 1). The Equality Act, 2010, introduced shortly before the last election, exhorts schools and other public bodies to “foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it” (HMSO, 2010, p. 96). Furthermore, under the Coalition Government, the new QTS “Standards”, effective from September 2012, include expectations for teachers to

*“maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour...by:*

- *having regard for the need to safeguard pupils’ well-being*
- *showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others...*
- *ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils’ vulnerability”* (DfE, 2011, p. 14).

However the final point in this section might well be interpreted as a need for caution when engaging with controversial issues. Although teachers will defend the importance of ensuring that young people are informed and able to make their own decisions based on wide-ranging access to a variety of stand-points and opinions, many shy away from teaching about refugee issues as being too political and partisan, as already discussed.

With the introduction of the new National Curriculum in England in 2014, under the Coalition Government, Citizenship as a discreet subject has been removed completely from KS1 and KS2, although there is an acknowledgement in the preamble that “all schools should make provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), drawing on good practice. Schools are also free to include other subjects or topics of their choice in planning and designing their own programme of education” (DfE, 2013, p. 4). Although this sounds hopeful in theory, it is possible that from now on refugee issues will be left more to curriculum areas such as English, History, Geography, and possibly Drama and Art to provide a platform, with the associated danger that without explicit inclusion in the curriculum, they may be ignored altogether. Furthermore, if children’s literature about refugees is dealt with solely through “Literacy” teaching, which under the 2014 curriculum places much more weight on the teaching of spelling, vocabulary, punctuation and grammar (contained in two appendices of 34 pages in length), the subject matter of such texts may well become hijacked by an over concentration on literacy rather than literature objectives.

### **2.6.2 Identifying good practice**

Children of the Storm (1998), a practical guide for teachers, identified the important role of schools in disseminating information about the refugee experience in order to foster greater understanding. In order to do this effectively children, and possibly teachers too, require access to alternative discourses from the dominant media agenda with regards to the refugee experience (Habib, 2008), highlighting elements such as the reasons for flight, the nature of the journey, the likely reception in the host country, and the hostility and racism reported frequently when trying to establish a new life and integrate. Opportunities to unpick negative terminology such as “illegal asylum seeker”, a term the Press Complaints Commission ruled in 2003 as a breach of its code of practice, serve to demonstrate other possibilities by clarifying that everyone has a legal right to claim asylum. An understanding that “refugees are ordinary people, but had to go through extraordinary

experiences” (Rutter, 1991, p. 4) is useful to highlight that the conditions which caused their situation could happen to any of us at any time.

Some studies add further dimensions to the teaching of refugee issues in school. King (2003) reported on the potential for attitudinal change amongst primary school children when hearing at first hand the stories of a Rwandan refugee. Watts (2004) also demonstrates how drama workshops for young people could engender empathy towards refugees who had previously been dismissed as “undeserving” (Sales, 2002). However the methods by which refugee issues are introduced into the curriculum, particularly in the secondary setting are problematised by some researchers. Day (2002) highlights the use of ‘Forum Theatre’, where students take on the role of a character, as a powerful learning experience when tackling refugee issues, but suggests that information of a more factual kind is necessary to supplement sessions. Furthermore, she asserts, empowering children with positive strategies to help refugees is necessary, in order to make learning meaningful.

Examples of good Citizenship lessons dealing with refugee issues are to be found both in the primary and secondary area. Learning about human rights, using the situation of refugees as a case study, and making cross-curricular links with History, Geography, Literacy, Art, Drama etc. is particularly effective. Claire (2004) showed how a mixture of methods such as PSHCE discussions, high quality literature (for example reading *The Other Side of Truth* to the class), and factual research can influence primary children’s perceptions, and this can affect whole-school approaches. However Rutter’s (2005) study criticized Citizenship lessons which purported to tackle refugee issues, dismantle stereotypes and foster empathy. She suggested that lessons which unleash a torrent of racist opinions, that may go unchallenged, or lack adequate follow-up, can be counter-productive to the refugee cause. Isolated token lessons proved to be ineffectual, with substantially greater commitment in terms of hours and cross-curricular links called for (ibid). Furthermore there is a great need for staff training in teaching about sensitive and controversial issues (Lodge, 1998). Other subject areas, such as art and music, offer

potential sites for this work and use it as a stimulus for creative expression, but also whole-school initiatives, such as Refugee Week, can provide a focus.

### **2.6.3 Using children's literature to teach about refugee issues**

Studies show that the optimum way to give a rounded and reliable picture of the refugee experience is through a mixture of hard data, personal testimony and discussion (King, 2003) (Watts, 2004). Educators can provide data and facilitate debate, but organising a visit by a refugee prepared to provide stories of their life and journey is not always easy. In the absence of such real-life speakers "literature is .... invaluable for enabling children to explore the affective as well as the factual aspects" (Menter, et al., 2000, p. 226). Many of the factors contributing to the refugee experience are represented in literature for children. Often stories begin with life prior to flight, describing the build-up to leaving and the journey to safety. Less usual are depictions of the asylum process, as this tends to deal with technicalities and bureaucracy, as previously mentioned (Cornell, 2010), but books that are brave enough to tackle this area are notable for their honesty, not glossing over the difficulties encountered when arriving in the host country, and avoiding the trap of a "happy ending."

Myhill (2007) also puts forward a powerful argument for using children's literature to address such issues:

*"In particular, the combination of imaginative identification with characters in novels, plus the psychological safety that fiction provides makes it a rich resource for dealing with controversial issues" (ibid, p. 55).*

She suggests a variety of drama and discussion activities as excellent means of access, drama providing opportunities for expressing ideas and opinions that can explore alternative perspectives, and discussion offering a range of views, but requiring effective handling to give every child a voice. The role of the teacher is particularly important here in managing opposing views competently, knowing the topic well, and not steering responses toward their own agenda. Guidance on using children's books to address topics such as

war, terrorism, justice, and freedom is given to teachers by Gopalakrishnam (2011) through basic principles such as showing that the story is “real”, setting the context, time period and situation, allowing students to react in any way, using a variety of discussion tools, and helping students make intertextual and narrative connections (ibid, p.158-9).

Examples of using children’s literature to address refugee issues in the primary age-group are few and far between. A scheme of work produced by Westminster Education Action Zone for the primary age range, entitled *A Welcome Experience* (Herbert, undated), is based around various children’s literature to highlight the refugee situation for all children in mainstream classrooms, *The Colour of Home* being one example. Its aims are explicit: to relate the refugee experience to common feelings that all can share, and to reassure children that change can be positive, so that, more particularly, refugee children can recognise and deal with their own reactions. Woodberry Downs Primary School website displayed schemes of work for studying *Refugee Boy* and Naidoo’s *The Other Side of Truth*, discussed in depth in Chapter 8 (now not available). The Greenwich and Lewisham Young People’s Theatre (GLYPT) frequently put on productions which highlight the refugee experience, an example being a play and drama workshop in school based on the Deborah Ellis’ *Mud City* (2004) (GLYPT, n.d.). Finally, as recently as 2010, Newham EMAS team ran In-service Training (INSET) for teachers to increase awareness of the needs of refugee pupils, and to explore opportunities to include refugee issues in the curriculum as part of an on-going focus. This contained guidance on introducing *The Colour of Home* in the classroom, and was accompanied by course leaders working in schools to support a programme of study, discussed more fully in Chapter 6.

## **2.7 Reflections**

*“Raising awareness of what it means to be a refugee ... is a vital step in understanding the needs of refugee children”* (Bolloten & Spafford, 1998, p. 109).

Such awareness is important both for the teachers of refugee children and also their classmates, who are often called upon to perform a welcoming role, and whose friendship will be crucial to the acceptance of such children into the school and local community. It is obviously advantageous if children are educated about what causes someone to become a refugee, the possible issues they may face, and how to help them in developing a new identity in the host country. Although ample opportunities exist to tackle refugee issues as part of broader educational agendas, curriculum constraints are playing an increasing role in stifling this kind of engagement, discussed fully in Chapter 3. Furthermore, teachers can shy away from addressing such a controversial and sensitive area, sometimes due to concerns about the effect such work might have on refugee children in the class, and also because of a lack of knowledge, understanding and confidence in dealing with such a complex and emotive problem. This brings us back to the question of whether teachers have a “well-founded fear” of handling refugee issues in the classroom, which is one of the topics that my study will investigate.

## Chapter 3: Literary Theory and Critical Pedagogy

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter will consider three main discussions in literary theory which have relevance to my research, namely reader-response theory, the relationship between literature and ideology, and the interaction between literature and identity. The first perspective considers what happens when we read, and how readers respond to texts. As part of my research, I will be drawing on this school of thought to interrogate how young children react to the texts chosen, in the primary classroom. The other two perspectives operate on a macro and micro level, and both are relevant to my study, in that the role of books both to support or counter an ideology, and to promote or reflect diverse identities, are all part of the possible scope of children's literature about the refugee experience.

Using these aspects of literary theory, I look at pedagogical perspectives that have developed slowly over the last 30 years, that of dialogic method and critical literacy. The former builds on the work of thinkers such as Bakhtin, who released literary theory from the narrow confines of authorial ownership. More recently educationalists, such as Freire, have developed a radical "dialogic pedagogy", which has since evolved into a method of engagement with texts known as "critical literacy". The latter can be defined as a practice which

*"melds social, political, and cultural debate and discussion with the analysis of how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests"* (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

Finally a brief consideration of narrower national agendas in the UK in terms of the teaching of literacy and literature, in particular in the primary classroom, will be discussed.

## 3.2 *Early literary criticism: a focus on the text*

### 3.2.1 **New Criticism**

The Anglo-American New Criticism of the 1940s and 50s, as championed by T.S. Eliot, F.R Leavis and others, argued that previous literary theorists only concentrated on external factors that allegedly shaped the text and had not looked properly at the text itself. For them, the text was their exclusive concern, employing a close ‘disinterested’ textual analysis, attempting a scientific dissection of how a text achieves order, harmony, irony, paradox, tension etc. (Selden, et al., 2005). Although some studies still employ this close reading, it is far more common in recent times to consider the wider implications of literature, such as the role of the reader and influence of the culture, history, and context.

Furthermore, Leavis set out in his famous work “The Great Tradition” (1948) what he considered to be the idealised canon of English Literature; texts which in his opinion, successfully distilled the entirety of human experience. Those inscribed in the canon were novelists and poets such as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad, T.S. Eliot and D.H. Lawrence, a perception which holds to this day, in disregard for any form of mass or popular culture, or awareness of power relationships and issues of class status. Such a socially, geographically and culturally exclusive tradition can also be identified in children’s literature.

*“The great children’s novelists are Lewis Carroll, Rudyard Kipling, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Arthur Ransome, William Mayne, and Philippa Pearce,”*

asserts Inglis (1981) in conscious mimicry of Leavis. These books conform to the prerequisites of the “classic realist text” (Belsey, 1980), where the author is the producer and controller of meaning, and where narrative conventions encourage the reader to accept that the world of the text is equivalent to the real world, allowing no critique of the liberal humanist values that are taken as read. By concealing itself as natural and ‘common sense’, this ideology abnegates itself, claiming that its values belong to a universal ‘human nature’

rather than having a “reactionary political role” (Sarland, 2005). Many critics since have objected to the exclusivity and Anglo-centred nature of “The Great Tradition”, and de-constructed the idea of the universality of its subject matter.

### 3.2.2 The Bakhtin school

In contrast, the work of Medvedev, Voloshinov, and Bakhtin, in Russia, had asserted that language could not be separated from ideology, and had attempted to draw literature back into the social and economic sphere (Selden, et al., 2005). Bakhtin (1934), in particular, questioned the idea of a unity of style and language, feeling that any text contained multiple codes. Coining the term “heteroglossia” to explain this concept, he proposed that all language represents a distinct point of view on the world, characterized by its own meaning and values. Discourse is not fixed for passive understanding, but is an arena of continuous class struggle. In this way, language is “ideologically saturated,” (ibid, p. 271) and thus there are no neutral words.

*“The word....enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment”* (ibid, p. 276).

Even the most unremarkable statement carries with it social, historical and material conditions which will ensure that a word uttered, in that place, at that time, will have a meaning different than it would have at any other juncture. If we consider this in the context of the multiple values attached to words such as “refugee” or “asylum seeker” we can see that “heteroglossia” is immediately evident.

Bakhtin identified the act of speech or writing as a literary-verbal performance, a dialogue, one that requires speakers or authors to take a position. Literature was not treated as a direct reflection of social forces, but a vehicle for disrupting authority and liberating different voices. The power of the novel originates in the coexistence of, and conflict between, different types of speech: the speech of characters, the speech of narrators, and particularly the speech of the author; “the social diversity of speech types” (ibid, p. 262). He argues that the internally dialogic quality of novelistic discourse means that it

is a hybrid of the rhetorical and artistic genres, built on the interaction of the two. In this way literature is both ideological and aesthetic in purpose, and in masking itself as primarily aesthetic in function, it has the power to influence ideologically in subtle and often unidentified ways. Rather than the artistic work being seen as a self-sufficient “closed authorial monologue” (ibid, p. 274), as with the traditional and epic forms, modern texts are “polysemic” in nature, containing multiple codes in which the authorial voice does not dominate. In fact the author is perceived as merely a “voice among many, holding together strands of the text’s composition” (Burke, 1992).

### **3.3 *The birth of the reader***

#### **3.3.1 Early influences**

As early as 1938, Rosenblatt began to examine the reading process and elevate the role of the reader, focusing on responding to the literary text as a unique “event”, conditioned by multiple facets pertaining to that particular reader.

*“The special meaning and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text”* (Rosenblatt, 1938, pp. 30-31).

However it wasn’t until the emergence of post-structuralism in the late 1960s, questioning the idea of any unified “truth”, that Bakhtin’s theories of discourse were picked up and expanded on. Barthes’ famous essay “The Death of the Author” (1968, first published in English 1977) claimed that “the birth of the reader is at the cost of the death of the author” (ibid, p. 148), which remains one of the most controversial tenets of modern literary criticism. Barthes criticised the search for explanation in the person and history of the author, and stressed that the author does not have a single voice, but is only the originator of the text, subject to multiple linguistic influences:

*“the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture”* (ibid, p. 147).

This links back to Bakhtin’s concept of “heteroglossia”, or many voices, and also the shaping of textual meaning by the influence of other texts, known as “intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1966), with the reader free to connect the text with systems of meaning they can relate to, and ignoring the author’s ‘intention’. However Foucault’s essay “What is an Author?” (1969, first published in English 1979) suggested that the abolition of the author is not possible, but that no author owns the meanings or readings of his/her text and it needs to be considered as a historical construction, an ideological product. Here we can see future links to the deconstruction of the authorial position in post-colonial literary criticism, discussed later.

### **3.3.2 Reader response theory**

By the 1960s and 1970s a school of thinking coming under the umbrella theory of reader response had emerged, countering the nineteenth century view that a literary text had a ‘hidden meaning’ or appearance of truth, to be interpreted by the literary critic for the reader. Wolfgang Iser argued for a spectrum of possible readings (1972, first published in English 1974) between that of the ‘implied reader’ and the ‘actual reader’. He also asserted (Iser, 1976, first published in English in 1978) that the reader brings to the work ‘pre-understanding’, a context of beliefs and expectations. A literary work is incomplete until the reader has ‘actualized’ those elements that are left to the imagination. The work itself is virtual in character and is situated somewhere between the author’s text and the aesthetic realization accomplished by the reader, both of which are important in a two way transmission process, “a dynamic happening” (ibid, p. 22). The text produces ‘blanks’ or ‘gaps’ that the reader selects and organises, excluding some and ‘concretising’ others – giving shape or meaning in the act of reading. Perspectives may shift or be qualified, and may move forwards, but also backwards, re-defining what we have already read.

At the same time Rosenblatt (1978) deepened her “transactional” theory of literature, the idea of a two-way relationship with the text, focusing on the role of the reader, similar to that outlined by Iser. She likened the author/text/reader to an electrical circuit – all important to the production of meaning. A different reader will form a different circuit and therefore a different meaning. In relating this to my study, it raises the idea that a book about the refugee experience will create an entirely different circuit (or meaning) for a reader who has become a refugee themselves, or is from a refugee background, than one who has no understanding or familiarity with this process, a possibility which is the focus of one of my research questions. Furthermore Rosenblatt was highly critical of much teaching of literature where she saw the interpretation of texts as primarily teacher-led. In opposition to this, she focussed on the student/reader, developing a theory that reading could be divided into two contrasting ways of experiencing a text—the “efferent” and the “aesthetic”, seen as a continuum that the reader can shift backwards and forwards along. The efferent (from the Latin *effere* to carry away), involves a basic gathering of information and understanding of the content of the text. The aesthetic stance, involves readers in an affective engagement with the text, through their own lived experience, the distinction of the two again being relevant to my own work. However, more recently writers such as Fox (2007) suggests that both the “efferent” and the “aesthetic” reading might simultaneously coexist.

Taking the transactional view a step further, Fish (1980) claimed that there is no objective work of literature, only interpretations. As readers we are part of an ‘interpretive community’ in which we are trained, that gives us a particular way of reading a text. This exists prior to the act of reading and therefore determines the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. An individual’s response is determined by the conventions of reading that they have been educated into, within a particular socio-historical context, using strategies that guide them to seek certain meanings, but in this way Fish did not allow for individual or deviant interpretations, as we shall discuss later. Eagleton commented humorously on Fish’s radical stance:

*“The true writer is the reader: dissatisfied with mere Iserian co-partnership in the literary enterprise, the readers have now overthrown the bosses and installed themselves in power”* (Eagleton, 1983, p. 74).

### **3.3.3 Reader response in children’s literature**

Harding (1962 & 1977) put forward a theoretical evaluation of the role of the reader of children’s literature, suggesting that they are like someone listening to gossip,

*“a non-participant relation which yet includes an active evaluative attitude”* (ibid, p. 59).

Furthermore Harding has problems with the term “identification” and the idea that the act of reading is a form of vicarious experience. He feels this is too general a description of what happens when we read, preferring to consider a multiplicity of emotions varying from empathy, imitation, admiration, or recognition of similarities. For Harding, the reader is similar to an onlooker, as they frequently know more about the situation than the individual characters do, and may fall in love with the hero/heroine, or wish to befriend a character. The reader may also construct imagined events for the characters, beyond those that actually exist in the text, and developed through the use of imagination. Harding also felt that, through reading, we are engaged in the discussion of life chances, the “suppose...” paradigm which is commonly found in children’s talk.

*“We can release our imaginings from practical limitations and consider what might have been and what might be.”* (ibid, p. 61)

The author offers possibilities of experience and attitudes towards those experiences, which the reader can accept or reject. Thus the background of the author, as well as their values and attitudes, are vital to the portrayal of characters and events, social interactions and moral dilemmas. Similarly, the reader’s perception of these factors is also strongly influenced by their own culture, but can be subject to change.

Chambers (1995) looked more closely at “the reader in the book” and explicitly at the mechanics by which the author forges an alliance with the “implied reader” (see Iser above), in order to manipulate him/her towards the meanings he wishes to convey by techniques such as assuming the role of god-like, all seeing narrator, or through the character of child in the first person. The author communicates to the reader, through both subtle and more obvious ways, by his/her comments on the event in the story, or by the attitude s/he adopts towards his/her characters and their actions. Chambers asserts that this is achieved through “assumptions of commonality” (ibid, p. 47), which may

*“become so dominant in the text that people who do not...make the same assumptions feel alienated by them as they read”* (ibid).

A link here with the possible differing responses of refugee and non-refugee readers will be developed later.

### **3.4 Literature and ideology**

#### **3.4.1 Recent Marxist theories of literature**

With the growth in literature and its availability, and the mushrooming of popular media, recent Marxist theoreticians have highlighted the pervasive power of texts. Jameson (1981) held that cultural objects, such as works of literature, must be understood according to cultural rules. With his famous slogan “always historicize”, he argued that careful and detailed analysis of cultural practices would reveal art and culture to be grounded in economic realities. Furthermore the individual is always part of an historical tradition or movement, and all interpretations are ideological, but portrayed as natural. This is particularly the case with children’s literature, which usually seeks to deny political influences, although this is not necessarily possible when writing about the causes of “refugeeness”.

Emerging from this perspective, and building on Foucault’s (1969, first published in English 1979) ideas on “discourse” and Kristeva’s (1966) concept of “intertextuality”, New Historicism is a school of literary theory that developed

in the 1980s, mainly through the work of Greenblatt (1982). It is a method based on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts (Barry, 1995), engaging with texts from all fields as part of culture. A similar school of thought, Cultural Materialism, uses a term borrowed from Williams (1977) by Dollimore and Sinfield (1994), and aims to understand literature through its historical context, and cultural and intellectual history through literature, leading to revelations about the politics of our past. Both these closely connected fields have direct relevance to the study of children's books about refugees, many of which attempt to historicise literature, including "real" historical action alongside fictionalised accounts, and mingling other forms of text such as newspaper headlines with story-telling to create an authentic and historically rooted illusion.

### **3.4.2 Children's literature and ideology**

How effective children's literature is as a transmitter of values and attitudes has been debated long and hard over centuries. Zimet (1976) traced reactions to the influence of print way back, to demonstrate a long-standing conviction that it can affect beliefs and behaviours, both positively and negatively. The problem with attempting any type of empirical proof of this assertion is that there are so many other variables in the equation, so that the strongest evidence of the power of writing in influencing opinions is the personal testimonies of readers. However she clearly flagged up the role of the teacher or parent in the selection of reading material, and the manner in which it is introduced to children to transmit an ideological viewpoint. Her study concluded that the relationship between reading and prejudice had limited effect, and that people used literature to reinforce existing standpoints.

*"Through the conscious control and presentation of specific content, the attitudes and behaviour of children and adults was modified in predicted directions, demonstrating in effect that we are what we read" (her emphasis) (ibid, p. 17).*

Hollindale (1988)<sup>3</sup> focussed particularly on the position of the author and saw that ideology in literature works on three levels; the social, moral or political ideology of the individual writer, the author's unexamined assumptions, and the influences of the world in which the author lives. The first is overt and at times "crudely didactic" (ibid, p. 5), the second operates more passively through characters or narrative, which Hollindale suggests is the domain of the more "gifted" writer (ibid) and the third is an unconscious ideology of which the author him/herself is unaware, part of an underlying "climate of belief" (ibid, p. 10) that underpins the vast majority of fiction. "A large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in" (ibid, p. 7). This finds echoes in the "Death of the Author" argument dealt with earlier. Stephens (1992) also held that

*"the discourse of a narrative fiction yields up both a story and a significance. Ideology may be inscribed within both"* (ibid, p. 2).

Because this is often implicit, it renders fiction particularly powerful in subliminally shaping attitudes, especially with a younger, more malleable audience. Children are seen as important vessels of societal norms to take - into the next generation, and writers may seek to perpetuate certain values, or oppose others, in an attempt to pass on their own world view. Not only this, but children's books are not the voices of children speaking, but an image of what adults think children are like. As Rose (1984) points out, children's literature is a misnomer, as it is commissioned, written, and chosen for reading primarily by adults, be it publishers, writers, teachers or parents, to such an extent that Nodelman (1992) asserts that it has been "colonized" by adults.

Many studies have concentrated on the viewpoint of the reader to consider the effect of literature on children's belief systems. Hollingdale (1988) suggests caution in this:

*"ideology is not something which is transferred to children as if they were empty receptacles. It is something which they already possess,*

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: [mail.scu.edu.tw/~jmklassen/scu101/gchlit/Hollindale-Ideology.doc](mailto:mail.scu.edu.tw/~jmklassen/scu101/gchlit/Hollindale-Ideology.doc) (Hollindale's original pamphlet is out of print, so page numbers taken from this copy.)

*having drawn it from a mass of experiences far more powerful than literature.” (ibid, p. 9)*

He also maintained that an overly-didactic message can be counter-productive, only reinforcing pre-existing prejudices. Other writers have seen a variety of factors at play in the transmission and reception of a system of values and attitudes through children’s literature. Cullingford (1998) asserted that child readers, as with adults, are subject to historical, social and cultural contexts:

*“Not only the time in which the reader lives but the political outlook he holds will influence the interpretation” (ibid, p. 1).*

However Sarland (2005) suggests that fatalistic views which see readers as victims of ideologically saturated fiction are simplistic, and that for children and young people as readers “there is a dialectical relationship between determinism and agency” (ibid, p. 46), a useful view to motivate the on-going study of children’s reader response.

Naidoo (1992) investigated the possibilities of challenging racism through literature, of which she found little evidence, as already mentioned in Chapter 1. What her study did foreground, however, was the pivotal role of the teacher in framing the discourse of reader response to the texts in question. Like Zimet, Chambers’ (1991) highlighted the important part played by “enabling adults” in children’s experience of the “Reading Circle” (discussed fully below). As an element of this cycle, he points out that if teachers always choose the text, without consulting or listening to children, this puts them in a very powerful position in developing children’s attitudes and values. This was demonstrated clearly by Wollman-Bonilla (1998) who listed three major reasons why trainee teachers reject children’s literature as “inappropriate for children”: (1) the text might “frighten or corrupt”, (2) the text “fails to represent dominant social values or myths” and (3) the text “identifies racism or sexism as a social problem” (ibid, p. 289), thus forging a differentiation between acceptable classroom discourses and the wider world.

### 3.5 *Literature and identity*

#### 3.5.1 Post-colonialism

Post-colonialism as a school of thought consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism, with a key goal being to give space to voices previously silenced by dominant ideologies. When Achebe (1977) attacked the canonical Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) for its racism and Euro-centred perspective (as discussed in the Introduction), a new era of literary criticism was born, but voices from the ex-colonies were slow to assert themselves, and not well-received. Said (1978) (1983) widened the post-colonial perspective, by asserting that western discourse constructs the Orient, in particular, as exotic and "Other". In terms of literature, post-colonialism examines the representation of cultures treated as "Other" by literary texts, perceiving that European cultural traditions have been taken as the norm, with the marginalization of the language and culture of colonised peoples and minority groups. As Kapuscinski (2006, first published in English 2008) asserts, until recently the "Other" has been researched by anthropologists, ethnographers, travellers and journalists, rather than allowing post-colonial literature to speak directly to us. Now we have a growing genre which highlights problems of identity for those influenced by a diversity of cultures and developing subsequent "hybridity" (Hall, 1992) (Bhabha, 1994), while addressing questions of assimilation of one culture into another.

Since its inception, post-colonial criticism has contained many insoluble debates, pertaining as it does to a very diverse set of writings. Ashcroft et al. (1989) argue that works produced *during* colonial times, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) should also be included, as "affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day" (ibid, p.2). Rushdie dislikes (as with the term "Commonwealth Literature") the division of so-called post-colonial literature from the rest of the English canon, a difference which he expresses as

*"the madness of trying to define a writer according to his own passport"*  
(Rushdie, 1992, p. 76)

Writers from “the settler colonies” of the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, are included by Ashcroft et al. (1989), but this position is criticised by the Jamaican writer, Walder (1998), who feels it leads to a flattening of the issues which post-colonial works often represent, and thus a loss of richness and complexity.

As far as children’s literature about refugees is concerned, we have seen in Chapter 1 that many writers do actually come from ex-colonies; Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa etc., but most of them are white, and therefore might well be excluded from the post-colonial umbrella. Others have connections with a particular area or people through travel and work, rather than through birth and origin, and very few are actually refugees themselves. Aspects of this have been discussed in a famous article by Spivak (1988): “Can the Subaltern Speak?” “Subaltern Studies” began in the early 1980s in South Asia, with the idea of attempting to view colonialism from the point of view of the oppressed, marginalised and voiceless, who cannot speak for themselves. Spivak (1988) considers the problematic of the Western-influenced/educated middle class intellectual and critic “speaking for” the subaltern, but concludes that unless this happens their voices will always be lost. hooks (1990) however, rejects the manner in which the Western academic will use the subaltern’s experiences, but not listen to their explanations, instead putting on their own lens and colonising the subject once again.

*“[There is] no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the] colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk” (ibid, p. 343).*

In attempting to provide a voice for those normally silenced Boal (1993), building on Freire’s (1970) radical pedagogy discussed fully later, developed a dramatic method known as the “Theatre of the Oppressed. In this model, the audience becomes active, to explore, analyse and transform the reality in

which they are living, for example through “Forum Theatre”, discussed in Chapter 2 as a means for aiding understanding of refugee issues. Recently there is growing interest in the “politics of voice” (Hazel, 1996), which is becoming a discipline in its own right. Such concepts link to my study in two ways, by the possibility “giving voice” to refugee stories, and “giving voice to children”, particularly refugees, or those from a refugee background, the latter becoming as contested an activity as the former (James, 2007).

### **3.5.2 Migration literature**

Now a newly-defined genre is emerging which is relevant to my study, deriving from the post-colonial situation, namely that of migration literature. The so-called settler colonies of the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand have, by their very nature, a long tradition of literature written by migrants. The recent nomenclature of the genre has its roots in Germany with literature written by “Gastarbeiter” – guest workers, who are usually Turkish in origin (Beilschmidt, 2009). For more than a century the explicit study of human migration has been undertaken by social scientists – geographers, sociologists, anthropologists, social historians, economists (King, et al., 1995), as previously mentioned. Understanding was derived mainly from statistics or more recently some interpretive data (observation, particularly ethnographic), but such methods fail to capture what it really means and feels like to be a migrant (ibid). Fiction can lead to powerful insights into the experience, being more personal and individual than statistics, and in this way provide a cross-over between social science and literature. However (Beilschmidt, 2009) asserts:

*“Reception of this literature was based on a sociological interest, not on a genuine evaluation of the literary quality” (ibid, p.4).*

It was, and still is, regarded largely as autobiographical or documentary literature, with little attention paid to its literary value (Rösch, 2004), a point that can be applied to refugee literature also.

Refugee stories reflect *forced* migration, which, while sharing many aspects of the generic field, has other agendas, as discussed in Chapter 2, and for that reason I have designated literature about the refugee experience as a “genre” of migration literature, although again the distinction is not always a clear one. King et al. (1995) point out that migrant literature is slow to develop in a host country as it takes time to learn an unfamiliar language sufficiently well to use it for literary purposes. The writing of children’s literature seems to be a further step along this continuum, as some migrants (and refugees) do not come from countries where plentiful children’s literature is produced, both for economic and cultural reasons. Furthermore, Duffy (1995) asserts that much migrant writing is not by migrants, but by writers who are of migrant ancestry or in some way the product of past migrations, or professional authors labelled or racialised by the society in which they were born (for example, Irish writers). It has also been noted in Chapter 1 that literature about refugees is rarely written by refugees, although several authors have migration stories in their pasts. However, non-migrant writers who are engaged intellectually with the movement of people as “a migrant aesthetics...(a) cosmopolitan, transnational, and hybrid vision of social life” (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 22), can also produce insightful migrant fiction.

As a genre, there are several easily recognisable themes in migration literature, dealing variously with the social contexts in migrants’ country of origin which prompted them to leave, the experience of migration itself, and the reception received in the country of arrival, including experiences of racism and hostility. These closely mirror Hamilton and Moore’s (2004) stages of refugee adaptation, discussed in Chapter 2. A dominant theme is a pervasive sense of rootlessness and search for identity, resulting from displacement and cultural diversity, and a shifting sense of self is continually renegotiated (White, 1995). In some work a perpetual sense of “Otherness” is continually reflected as is

*“the juxtaposition of two worlds, the one left behind and the one of arrival and future residence”* (Hussein, 2004, pp. 106-7).

Considering the possibility of return, or attempts to integrate and assimilate into the new culture is also part of the agenda, and the struggle for legitimisation and the nature of citizenship (Coward, 2006) may be explored. Literature provides effective exploration of this fragmentation, dislocation, alienation, and ambivalence and extends the understanding of the long-term impacts and even “pain” (Hron, 2009) of migration. However crises of identity are more normalised in recent times, as acceptance of multiple identities replaces the struggle for assimilation (Schmann, 2011), and the new generation invents their own literary concepts and models, and “possibilities of transformation” (Hussein, 2004, p. 112), demonstrating the resilience previously discussed in Chapter 2.

### **3.5.3 Children’s literature and personal connections**

In Chapter 1 I have already discussed the work of Bishop (1990) who considers that negotiating books in a multi-cultural environment can be divided into texts as “windows” into the experience of others, “mirrors” which reflect the reader’s experience, and “sliding glass doors” which invite the reader to pass through from observer of others to participate in the experience, through the medium of literature. Gangi and Barowsky (2009) assert that the “windows” and “mirrors” paradigm is particularly useful in helping children suffering the effects of war, terrorism or disaster, as

*“having access to such books helps children know the world has not forgotten them and may help decrease their feelings of isolation by providing a bond with others when they learn of those who have experienced similar circumstances” (ibid, p. 9).*

For the purposes of this study, while taking into consideration children’s possible backgrounds, we should perhaps move focus away from the notion of refugee and non-refugee, as Zetter (1991) suggests that the term ‘refugee’ is a bureaucratic identity assigned by outsiders, through international law.

More generally many writers have addressed the dual role of literature in offering insights into our own and others’ lives (Cullingford, 1998). Readers need to see themselves represented in books to affirm their place in the world

(Bishop, 1992) but reading also helps children to develop their imaginations through story, thereby increasing their understanding of “the common pool of humanity” (Britton, 1993, p. viii). Through books children can visit geographical and historical locations that are different from their own (Lathey, 2001) and this can develop tolerance and understanding, as well as clarifying their own cultural identity. Such activities

*“emphasise the part that children’s literature plays in the development of children’s understanding of both belonging (being one of us) and differentiation (being other),”* (Meek, 2001, p. x)

but I would suggest that post-colonial narratives also play a powerful part in validating the experiences of those who feel *they* are “Othered” by mainstream discourses.

Another relevant paradigm is the early work of Cochran-Smith (1984), identifying types of adult-child verbal interactions around story reading. These included “life-to-text”, interactions that helped story-listeners use their knowledge in order to make sense of texts, and “text-to-life”, interactions that helped story-listeners use textual knowledge to make sense of their lives. This has been refined by Keene and Zimmerman (1997) who purport that students comprehend better when they make different kinds of connections to a text, namely: “text-to-self”, “text-to-text”, and “text to world”. “Text-to-self” means personal connections that a reader makes between a book and their own experiences or life, “text-to-text” is connections made between one text and another (also known as “intertextuality”), and “text-to-world” is when connections are made between the book and something happening in the world at large. However Harvey and Goudvis (2000) point out that building the necessary background knowledge is a crucial means for providing text-to-world support, something that is discussed in future chapters.

### 3.6 Pedagogical perspectives

#### 3.6.1 The “enabling adult” fostering a “community” of readers

After investigating authors’ motivations and aims, this study concerns itself with the sharing of children’s literature in the primary classroom, as previously mentioned. For this reason pedagogical perspectives form an important backdrop to the research, to be discussed below.

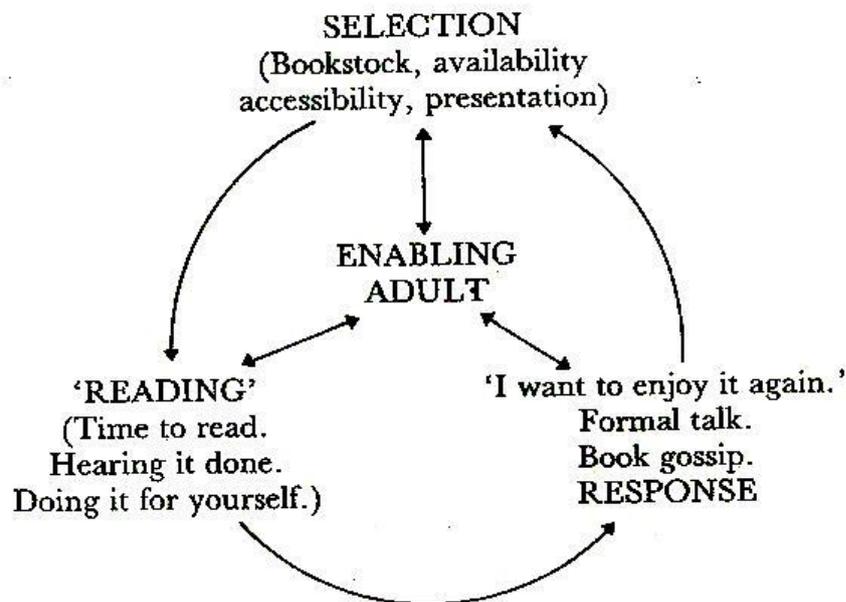


Figure 8: The Reading Circle (Chambers, 1991)

Figure 8, shows Chambers’ representation of “The Reading Circle” (1991), concerning the selection, reading and response to texts, focusing on the role of “enabling adults” – teachers, librarians, parents, writers, publishers etc. who help children become literary readers. Through this model Chambers demonstrates how these various adults impact on every part of the process, and he maintains that a vital part of the reading process is the opportunity to discuss what has been read with an adult or with other children, or both. He asserts that through “book talk” children arrive at a greater understanding of the meaning and significance of a book, than they do as lone readers, and his “Tell Me” approach (Chambers, 1993) suggests that there is no single reading of a text, but the creation of a “community” of readers (Chambers, 1991),

jointly discovering their own interpretation. This openness in teaching style is important to Beverley Naidoo, as this quote from her interview, analysed in full in Chapter 5, shows:

*“Young people who are with teachers who encourage them to have that creative experience of reading... is going to open out a very significant door ... because you are saying to that young person I am not telling you what to think. Find out who these people are, see what you think, ask questions.”*

### **3.6.2 Dialogic method**

Since 1934, Bakhtin’s ideas on the nature of dialogue have fuelled much contemporary thinking on the nature of classroom discourse, and his assertion that “monologism” leads not to genuine interaction of a teacher and pupil, but only to “pedagogical dialogue” (1984, p. 81). He contrasted “authoritative discourse”, which presents itself as closed unchallengeable orthodoxy, with “internally persuasive discourse”, which is open and acknowledges the primacy of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). Similarly Paulo Freire (1970) challenged what he called the “banking” concept of education, depositing knowledge to be withdrawn again at a later date, compared to a process where, through dialogue, teachers and students search for “generative themes” from their own lives, on which to base the learning experience. Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) defined his view of the “dialogical method” as “a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it” (ibid, p. 98) and asserts that “through dialogue... we can then act critically to transform reality” (ibid, p. 99).

This leads us further into the theory of pedagogy, for if we are to discuss texts with children in exciting new ways, we must examine the mechanics of this “talk about texts” (Wells, 1992) (Maybin & Moss, 1993) (Mercer, et al., 1999). Chambers’ (1993) work on “booktalk” was pivotal in suggesting ways in which teacher questioning could move from simple recall to more critical engagement with the text. He suggested that all questions should start with “Tell me...” (rather than “Why?”) to add authenticity to the discussion, and give

the impression that the teacher is genuinely interested in the response, rather than “testing” the pupil. His programme put forward a framework of questioning that should develop out of the following four starting points:

*“Tell Me.....*

- Was there anything that you liked about this book*
- Was there anything that you disliked?*
- Was there anything that puzzled you?*
- Were there any patterns – any connections – that you noticed?” (ibid, p. 76)*

Chambers’ work is particularly pertinent to this study, as he highlights the position of the teacher in chairing group discussions with children about books after a common reading. He criticizes the usual system where the teacher chooses the topic, and through the kinds of questions asked, steers the class to a reading of the book that the teacher wants them to reconstruct.

*“The teacher raises awareness and is a contributor of specialized knowledge, a guide to further sources, and a synthesizer of disparate and often conflicting comment” (ibid, p. 119)*

and carries enormous responsibility which is not always acknowledged. Cazden (1988) had already suggested that “authoritative discourse” was evidenced in the right to ask questions as a privilege reserved only for the teacher. Similarly, Nystrand et al. (1997) observed in the US a prevalence of “monologism” with teacher-initiated test-like questions, minimal elaboration of responses by the teacher, and pupils’ attempts to encourage new sub-topics being discouraged or ignored. However a small number of classes did contain “internally persuasive discourse” via the use of authentic questions, where the answer is not pre-specified, and there was opportunity for pupil responses to modify the topic of discourse.

Skidmore (2000) developed the contrasting concepts of “pedagogical dialogue” and “dialogical pedagogy” (see Figure 9). In the former, “someone who knows the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error” (ibid, p. 289). Skidmore et al. (2003) found that in this form the teacher

*“rarely asks authentic questions; normally controls turn-taking by nominating the next speaker; keeps a tight grip on the topic of conversation; and does most of the talking” (ibid, p. 52).*

<b>Pedagogic dialogue</b>	<b>Dialogic pedagogy</b>
Controlled by teacher	Shared control between teachers and pupils
Directed towards right answers	Directed towards exploring possibilities
Right answers are valued	‘Wrong’ answers and risk-taking are valued
Close teacher questioning	Open-ended speculative teacher questioning
Teacher has more ‘talk time’ than pupils	Pupils have more ‘talk time’ than teachers
Limited participation	Inclusive participation
Outcome focused	Unpredictable
Teacher owns the truth	Truth is the shared outcome

**Figure 9: Pedagogic dialogue and dialogic pedagogy (Skidmore, 2000)**

Pupils were merely asked to recall events with a right and wrong answer. In dialogical pedagogy, however, there was a minimal selection of pupils by the teacher, with only “light touch” intervention, and a “chaining” of pupil utterances – one building on the other. The pupils were asked authentic questions which had various possible answers, none of which was uniquely ‘correct’, and were opened up to

*“modification through considering other points of view, with the result that they attain a richer understanding of the story collectively than they would be likely to achieve individually” (Skidmore, 2000, p. 292).*

These ideas have been built on and refined by Alexander (2008) to look at how teachers as well as children talk in the classroom. He notes that the so-called 'recitation script' of what he calls a closed initiation-response-feedback (IRF) exchange, with closed teacher questions, brief recall answers and minimal feedback to "report someone else's thinking" (ibid, p. 93) remains dominant, but also 'pseudo-enquiry' where ostensibly open questions are "unfocussed and unchallenging" (ibid), and are accompanied by "phatic praise rather than meaningful feedback" (ibid). In his research comparing practices in primary classrooms in five countries, Alexander (2001) found that in England, a veneer of geniality and openness masked a more closed model, where the teacher, in looking for a specific answer, would continually rephrase the questioning, or even mouth the answer in their quest for conformity, so that neither a conversation nor a dialogue was achieved. Alexander (2008) identified five principles for good dialogic teaching:

1. *“collective: teachers and children address learning tasks together, whether as a group or as a class;*
2. *reciprocal: teachers and children listen to each other, share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints;*
3. *supportive: children articulate their ideas freely, without fear of embarrassment over ‘wrong’ answers; and they help each other to reach common understandings;*
4. *cumulative: teachers and children build on their own and each others’ ideas and chain them into coherent lines of thinking and enquiry;*
5. *purposeful: teachers plan and steer classroom talk with specific educational goals in view”.* (ibid, pp. 112-113)

In examining teacher-pupil interactions with text during three Key Stage One (5 to 7 year olds) shared reading sessions, John (2009) contrasted “teacher-framed”, “pupil-framed” and “collaborative” discourse in the classroom. In the first model there was an

*“almost complete absence of pupil contributions outside the IRF sequence... with the teacher’s agenda firmly at the fore”* (ibid, p. 125).

There was little time given to pupil “thinking time” and reflection, with teachers providing their own elaboration, and nominating children to speak, which acted

as an inhibitor to real discussion, under pressure to cover curriculum directives. In the second model it was the pupils, rather than their teacher, who determined the emphasis of the session, and there was far higher pupil participation, with the teacher as facilitator or enabler, exhibiting “low control”, signalling a genuine interest in what pupils think, encouraging them to take up particular (and if necessary, differing) positions in relation to the text in order to draw out meaning. Finally “collaborative” discourse is where pupils are engaged in a joint construction of meaning with the teacher which facilitates them making their own views, knowledge and questions known. An atmosphere was created in which children felt confident to contribute their own ideas, rather than the teacher “acting as the arbiter of a predetermined agenda” (ibid, p. 130). However, as with Alexander (2008), the teacher still plays a strong role in the process.

### **3.6.3 Critical pedagogy and critical literacy**

Freire’s (Freire & Macedo, 1987) radical pedagogy saw that literacy can provide knowledge, and that an understanding of the world is crucial to empowerment. Children come to school with prior experiences of life already forming their attitudes, as education is not restricted merely to the school environment, and they bring these personal and worldly understandings to bear on their reading to make sense of the text. Furthermore learning to read will enable them to comprehend and engage with the wider world, and a cyclical relationship is formed.

*“Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (ibid, p. 35).*

Freire has much to say about critical pedagogy which is relevant to my study:

*“The role of critical pedagogy is not to extinguish tensions. The prime role of critical pedagogy is to lead students to recognize various tensions and enable them to deal effectively with them....Frequently there is an ongoing denial of tensions, but these tensions should be understood” (ibid, p. 49).*

This relates closely to the use of children's books about refugees in the classroom, in that they function to lay bare problematic situations pertaining to children and their classmates, to draw attention to them. For Freire, critical pedagogy should stimulate students to reflect and begin to comprehend the relationship between many different world views. Instead of repressing students' creativity, teaching should encourage risk taking, stimulate students to doubt, to express themselves, and to "discourse about the world" (ibid, p. 53). Reading for pleasure is not enough, the acquisition of literacy being a political act. It should be emancipatory, and transformative, in that it gives students a greater understanding of themselves and the world around them, and can lead to social action, described using the Greek word "praxis" by Freire, and defined as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1970).

While Freire talked of critical pedagogy (on the part of teachers), others were calling for "critical literacy" (on the part of children). Scholes (1985), like Freire, saw that textual activity is a means by which to act within and upon the world. He asserted that there were three essential principles of textual study: reading (producing text within text), interpretation (text upon text) and criticism, (text against text), the last of these being the most significant. Furthermore, the role of the teacher is vital in helping students to engage with the multiple discourses of the text as human beings who have "textual power" (ibid, title). Meanwhile, Stephens argued in favour of a socio-political approach to texts, asserting that reader response theory is "a dangerous ideological tool and pedagogically irresponsible" (1992, p. 68). He asserted that it creates the illusion that readers have a purely personal response, while ignoring the political and ideological currents that they are part of, both explicit and implicit in the text.

Developing from these broad ideas Paul (1998), critiqued children's literature from a feminist viewpoint, suggesting that we need to ask questions of a text such as:

*"Whose story is this? Who is the reader? When and where was the reading produced? Who is named and who is not? Who is on top? Who*

*gets punished and who gets praised? Who speaks and who is silent? Who acts and who is acted upon? Who owns property? Who is dependent? Who looks? and who is observed? Who fights for honor? and who suffers? How are value systems determined?"* (ibid, p. 16).

Similarly, Botelho and Rudman (2009), in focusing on a "critical multicultural analysis of children's literature" (ibid, title), asked "who is represented, underrepresented, mis-represented, and /or invisible? How is power exercised?" (ibid, p. xiv). Both of these perspectives assert that there is no neutral, context-free construction of meaning from texts, and readers are encouraged to consider the motivations of the author for writing the text and the background from which they might come. They should also think of the text as "constructed" to serve a particular agenda, or deliver a certain message, which may need decoding.

Recent writing in the UK, the US and particularly the "Australian school", focuses on modes of developing critical literacy in the classroom. Similarly to Scholes (1985), Luke and Freebody (1990) saw children as code breakers, meaning makers, text users, and text critics, the final one being where critical literacy occurs. In examining what I have chosen to call the "constructedness" of the text (Fisher, 2008), readers need to ask questions such as:

*"How do particular texts work? What effects do they have on the reader? Who has produced the text, under what circumstances, and for which readers? What is missing from this account? How could it be told differently?"* (Comber, 2001, p. 1).

These are seen as "important catalysts in the process" (ibid) of critical literacy, using language to "exercise power... and to question practices of privilege and injustice" (ibid). Furthermore, in line with the thinking of Freire, a vital part of critical literacy is in the practice of linking texts to children's own experience, highlighting their relevance to readers' lives (Comber, 2001) (Hall, 2003).

Meanwhile characterizations, angles and debates on the meaning and use of critical literacy proliferate, so much so that Lewison et al. (2002) saw the need to synthesize the myriad of differing definitions of critical literacy into four useful and interrelated dimensions:

*“(1) disrupting the commonplace,  
(2) interrogating multiple view-points,  
(3) focusing on socio-political issues, and  
(4) taking action and promoting social justice”* (ibid, p. 382).

Furthermore, Aukerman (2012) defines critical literacy as recognizing that there are multiple possible responses to a text, that interpretations are contingent upon our histories and social locations, and that texts are not neutral, but by nature ideological, and she petitions for “dialogic engagement” (ibid, p. 42). Some of what is termed “critical literacy” she sees as in fact a particular predetermined “social justice” understanding or perspective on the text, “to learn to read the word and the world *right*” (ibid, p. 44). She takes issue with the notion of critical literacy as merely a space where the teacher makes texts available with social messages that will generate strong personal responses, does not stress multiple and contingent readings, and may also imply a preferred reading (usually concurrent with that of the teacher). Students need opportunities to discuss others’ viewpoints, have their own questioned, and revise their opinions, in the understanding that multiple reading positions are “socially constructed and ideologically charged” (ibid, p. 47).

#### **3.6.4 Government Agendas**

In 1998, the UK government introduced the National Literacy Strategy (NLS) which was seen as part of a major reform to improve standards of literacy in primary schools (Mroz, et al., 2000). It set out teaching objectives and guidance for a daily “Literacy Hour”, with a 30 minute whole class introduction, 20 minutes of group work time, and a 10 minute plenary (i.e. 60% direct teaching, and 40% working independently). This saw a

*“shift away from a previous emphasis on ‘one-to-one’ learning experiences to a focus upon more communal forms of learning which place the teacher centre stage”* (John, 2009, p. 123).

While maintaining a focus on “real books”, it signalled a radical change in approach, away from teachers reading individually with children, to whole class and group reading sessions. Teachers and pupils read enlarged texts or ‘big books’ together, and group or “guided reading” sessions involved small, ability-differentiated groupings, reading multiple sets of the same book, guided by the teacher.

Opportunities for “dialogic method” and “critical literacy” would seem to open up in this joint sharing of texts and “whole class interactive teaching” (Reynolds & Farrell, 1996) (Beard, 1999), with ample chance for discussion, conjecture and construction of meaning and response. However, many studies (Mroz, et al., 2000) (English, et al., 2002) (Burns & Myhill, 2004) noted that in fact the NLS model, with its rapid question and answer sessions, and “teacher-led discussion” (Reynolds, 1998), has led a return to more traditional patterns of ‘IRF’ (Initiation, Response, Feedback) exchanges which are limiting children’s engagement with texts.

*“Because of the teacher’s claim to prior knowledge of the subject content, and right to control the pacing and sequencing of its transmission, pupils rarely managed to impose their own relevance outside the teachers’ frame of reference” (Mroz, et al., 2000, p. 382)*

Furthermore, time for the teacher to read whole texts aloud to the class, as a social act, “giving of voice and breadth to a text” (Barrs & Cork, 2001, p. 216), seemed to be compressed by the ‘Literacy Hour’, being squeezed into other times of the day (Collins, 2005), or replaced by extracts from books, a position bemoaned by Ofsted (2002) in its evaluation of the first four years of the NLS. “The significance of reading aloud to children should not be underestimated” (Collins, 2005, p. 10), whether to pre-school, primary or secondary age, in bringing the text alive, and facilitating a “social construction of meaning” (Yandell, 2013). By establishing a shared experience and a “community” of readers (Chambers, 1991), children are enabled to access texts beyond their own reading ability, and build up listening and concentration stamina. It also

allows for discussion to occur, the meaning of the text to be explored and disputed, and critical reading to be encouraged (McDonald, 2004)

Meanwhile the small group “guided reading” sessions, did not follow the more open model of “literature circles” pioneered in the US by Harste et al., (1989), Daniels (1994), and Schlick Noe and Johnson (1999), which aimed to transfer informal talk about books into a more organised strategy. In this format children chose texts in small groups to discuss, and took up roles to direct and steer the proceedings. This kind of social interaction can prompt children

*“to ask new questions, to wonder and to make connections with their own experiences and with the experiences of others in the groups”* (King & Briggs, 2005).

Instead “guided reading” is a much more tightly controlled, teacher-led experience, the choice of text being pre-determined and compatible with ability, the focus of the session set by objectives dictated by the NLS. Fisher (2008) found that in “guided reading” sessions she observed, there was no opportunity for children to engage in collaborative discussion, create meaning, or develop “personal, analytical and critical response” (ibid, p. 25). King (2001) further warns that

*“Unless teachers are concerned with how readers actually respond experientially, emotionally and aesthetically to the texts they read, reading them may well be seen as a necessary chore rather than as a means of delight and exploration”* (ibid, p. 35).

As regards an holistic approach to children’s literature, the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999), which was current at the time of the research conducted in schools, contains in its preamble to the English programme of study two telling quotes about the value of literature to open doors:

*“A good book, studied with a good English teacher, takes you on a journey in search of answers to the crucial questions in life you didn’t*

*even know you wanted (or needed) to ask.’ Professor Lisa Jardine, Queen Mary & Westfield College, University of London.*

*‘Studying English literature at school was my first, and probably my biggest, step towards mental freedom and independence. It was like falling in love with life.’ Ian McEwan, Novelist.” (ibid, p. 43)*

However, a highly constrained view of the value of literacy still holds sway, dominated by objectives and targets, (Marshall, 2006) (Cliff Hodges, 2010) which influences how teachers encourage children to engage with literature. Reasons for reading have been neglected in recent years, not made explicit, and assumed, rather than discussed. Furthermore reading books that lead to creative and intellectually demanding responses and have “transformative potential” (O’Sullivan & McGonigle, 2010, p. 51) and “emotional power” (ibid, p. 55) does not constitute a large part of the curriculum. In fact “inspiring children as readers has hardly been on the agenda at all” (ibid, p. 51).

### **3.7 Reflections**

In this chapter I have traced the major thinking in literary theory over the last hundred years which has had a powerful impact on the way we approach children’s literature. The development of reader response theory as a methodological tool is particularly useful when considering the effect of books on young people’s attitudes and values. Moreover debates on the interrelationship between literature, wider ideology and individuals’ identity, are pertinent, with the more recent opening up of post-colonial writing and critiques. In considering where children’s texts about refugees might sit, I have found it useful to locate them in the generic area of migration literature, and looked at themes which are held in common. A further theoretical framework of critical pedagogy is one I will employ in interrogating the use of children’s literature about refugees in the primary age range. While “dialogic method” and “critical literacy” are seen as dynamic and inspirational practices, and have many proponents, researchers often find that the reality in the classroom is somewhat different. Government agendas, curriculum constraints, and formal, entrenched, organization and methods impinge in

many ways on eliciting reader response and facilitating any real discussion of children's analysis of texts, to the frustration of many in the education world. Nevertheless the discussion of how to employ critical literacy in the classroom continues, and work such as that of Leland, Lewison & Harste (2013) in the USA, and Roche (2015) in Ireland, continues to offer practical advice for teachers on "Critical Thinking and Book Talk – CT&BT" (ibid, p. 33).

## Chapter 4 – Methodology

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter demonstrates the steps I took to address my overarching research question:

**What role can children’s literature play in understanding and validating the refugee experience?**

As already stated, in order to narrow down the field of over 90 books on the topic and provide some in-depth analysis, I decided to focus on two texts by well-known authors, which are commonly used in London classrooms, with contrasting age groups, one for young children and one which bridges the primary/secondary divide.

The chapter begins by reviewing the philosophical perspectives that underpin my work, then evaluates the role of qualitative methodology, involving the use of a case study, and discusses the ethnographic elements, all contained within my research. Research design and sampling issues are highlighted with regards to the authors of the two books, as well as the schools and the classrooms I visited, and the teachers and children who I interviewed, particularly demonstrating “purposive” sampling, and “snowballing” as viable methods. I then look at the methodological tools used in the research, such as interviewing, discussion groups and classroom observation, including their genesis and my reservations about their use. I also discuss analysis of teachers’ plans and schemes of work, and children’s written and drawn response to the texts, showing how vital this was to an understanding of the research field. Following on from this I make visible the methods for collecting and analysing the data, using grounded theory methodology (GTM) and how I chose to employ it. Finally I consider limitations of the study and questions of validity and generalizability.

## **4.2 Research methodology**

My research belongs to the humanist tradition that deals with the nature of identity, affective characteristics such as emotion and feelings, and the study of individual and collective 'life-worlds'. Personally and professionally I am part of the post-modern era, conscious of power relationships in society, such as the researcher over the researched, and seeking to give voice to those who are dispossessed (Spivak, 1988) (hooks, 1990) (discussed in Chapter 3). Other post-modern themes in my work are related to identity and the fragmented nature of reality, with an emphasis on describing and understanding rather than cause-and-effect. I am a subscriber to the idea that through a discourse of language, behaviour and power, people negotiate different truths, making sense of the world through relationships and emotions that are all legitimate sources of information (Given, 2008).

Part of post-modern methodology is that the researcher does not have to strive to be neutral (Newby, 2010) and as such my work has a place in critical educational research, which is heavily influenced by the early work of the Frankfurt School, where "the expressed intention is deliberately political – the emancipation of individuals and groups in an egalitarian society" (Cohen, et al., 2005, p. 28). My perspective is also part of a political agenda, with a concern to promote social justice for refugee children. Moreover, throughout my study I identify frameworks and structures in society that constrain the way individuals and groups behave, such as the proscriptions of the National Curriculum in England, and the "Standards" driven, assessment-linked agenda, focusing upon accountability and measuring pupil success (George & Clay, 2008), both an important part of twenty first century educational discourse.

### **4.2.1 Qualitative research in an educational context**

As already discussed in Chapter 3, early explorations into the nature and impact of the reading process have flagged up problems with attempting a quantitative approach. Zimet (1976) highlighted in her study how difficult it is

to isolate the variables that influence children's thinking, and concluded that personal testimony, rather than before and after attitudinal tests, were preferable when attempting to assess the impact of literature on values and beliefs. Moreover Rosenblatt summed up the qualitative approach perfectly in her seminal work: "The Reader, the Text, the Poem" (Rosenblatt, 1978):

*"My aim was to immerse myself in a rich source of insights, not merely to accumulate a body of codified data" (ibid, x).*

Influenced greatly by both these previous studies, Naidoo (1992) attempted to affect classroom interventions by introducing texts which challenged prejudice and racism into a white secondary school classroom, but found that while she could adequately analyse the discussion and written responses of the students, the way the texts were presented by the teacher was limited in perspective and influenced the outcome of her study. In order to find answers to my research questions, I have therefore gathered data of a qualitative nature, but from an already existing field of engagement with children's books about refugees in many London classrooms, rather than setting up a new intervention, as Naidoo did. I was only able by virtue of the subject matter to engage in personal contact with a relatively small sample. With such a controversial and affective area as this, a large scale study could overlook nuances of meaning, and not foster the trust that is needed to explore the subject fully, as discussed by Mishler (1990).

#### **4.2.2 A case study approach**

A case study is a detailed analysis of an individual circumstance or event that is chosen either because it is typical or because it is unusual. However, case studies can be viewed as problematic, due to the limits they set in terms of potential uniqueness which may not be transferable, and the inability to make comparisons, inhibiting the possibility of producing generalised insights. Basse (1981) prefers to talk about "reliability", rather than "generalizability" (ibid, p. 85), and considers that if case studies "are carried out systematically and critically, if they are aimed at the improvement of education, if they are

relatable, and if by publication of the findings, they extend the boundaries of existing knowledge, then they are valid forms of educational research” (ibid, p. 86). However in the post-modern era (discussed above), with growing interest in the local, and in identity and location, case studies serve to look at particular instances of practices or issues, rather than search for truths. They can also provide a comparison for the purpose of exploration, explanation or description. In this study I have used a case study approach in two ways, both in terms of the books I chose to look at closely and the schools I used to collect the data in.

As Chapter 1 demonstrates, the number of children’s books written about the refugee experience is very broad, and widening all the time. At the outset I had intended to research the field through looking at all texts, making comparisons of content, geographical and historical location of the story, the date of publication, and the gender, background and country of origin of the author. However I decided early on to focus on two books about the refugee experience, written by well-known authors that are most commonly read in the school classroom. I therefore chose *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth*, feeling that the primary age range would provide a rich and interesting, if controversial, field. I wanted to pursue a vertical approach (as mentioned in Chapter 1), interviewing the authors of those books, engaging with teachers mediating the books in the classroom, and the children reading them.

### **4.2.3 Ethnographic elements**

As already mentioned, I decided that my research methodology needed to be primarily qualitative in nature, and through such methods I could obtain the insights I needed. After some while it became clear to me that I could not explore the role of these texts with children if I did not “muddle about in the field” (Wolcott, 1975, p. 113) and observe first-hand what their initial responses were in the classroom. To some extent, therefore, my study contains some elements of ethnography, a methodological perspective which aims to study ordinary human behaviour in its context. Ethnography is “a

descriptive account of a community or culture” (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 1), which often aims to make visible the lives of people whose stories would not otherwise be told, part of my focus also. Derived originally from anthropological studies in the 1920s (Malinowski, 1922) (Mead, 1928), the researcher generally spends considerable time with the people being researched as a “participant observer”. Traditionally, knowledgeable informants are selected, who serve to represent the community under study, and identify other informants in a process known as “chain referral sampling” (Garson, 2012) or “snowballing” (Cohen, et al., 2005), which was very much my experience too.

Ethnography has since become a common framework in sociological studies and may relate to the study of cultures closer to the researcher’s own which involves “making the familiar strange” (see Section 4.4.3). It is “well established as a method in education research and is used to understand such things as classroom behaviour, the learning process, group values and behaviour, organisational management and change” (Newby, 2010, p. 59), as in my study. Multiple methods of data collection promote a more personal and in-depth understanding and can include observation, field notes, interviews, and also secondary research such as document analysis, all of which I used. “Thick description” is a term first used anthropologically by Clifford Geertz in “The Interpretation of Cultures” (1973, pp. 5-6) to describe the interpretive activity of the observer that ethnography offers, believing it to be the optimum way for making meaning to the outsider. However in order to make the data collection and interpretation transparent, researchers often attempt to be “reflexive”, aiming to explore the way the researcher’s own background and positioning influences the research, aspects of this being referred to at times in my work. Criticisms of the method are that ethnography lacks precision and is merely subjective, with its findings not easily replicated and therefore not “generalizable” (Hammersley, 2006). I will address this criticism later in the chapter.

#### 4.2.4 Overview of the data

The data was collected over a period of more than 6 years (see Appendix 2). In order to focus on the author, text, reader dynamic, I carried out a series of semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 5 for questions) with

- the two authors – Mary Hoffman and Beverley Naidoo
- a refugee education expert – Jill Rutter
- six teachers
- two children individually

and 25 children in discussion groups (see Appendix 6). Apart from Mary Hoffman, Beverley Naidoo and Jill Rutter, who are well-known in the public domain, the other participants have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity, in accordance with the Data Protection Act (1998), and BERA guidelines (BERA, 2011).

I also carried out:

- classroom observations and took extensive field notes
- analysis of lesson planning and schemes of work
- an analysis of children's written and drawn responses to the books (see Figure 10).

In Year 1, School A, the reading took place during one lesson only, so no discussion groups were held and the teacher did not make any planning available. In Year 1, School B, the focus on the book straddled two lessons, so I was able to engage in discussion with children, and the teacher gave me her plans. In Year 3 and 5, both books were studied over three and six weeks respectively, so far more observations were possible. The reason for changing from interviewing children to using discussion groups is discussed later in the chapter.

Being able to triangulate the data between interviews, classroom observations, discussion groups, schemes of work, lesson plans, and children's work was an

opportunity to tackle my research questions in many different directions. None of the methods on their own would have yielded such a comprehensive view of what took place during the period of study of the two books, and differing forms of data collection are thought to demonstrate reliability and validity. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson point out: “One should not adopt a naively optimistic view that the aggregation of data from different sources will unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture” (ibid, 1983, p. 199).

<b>Name of book</b>	The Colour of Home			The Other Side of Truth	
<b>School</b>	School A	School B	School A	School A	
<b>Year group</b>	Year 1	Year 1	Year 3	Year 5, Class X	Year 5, Class Y
<b>Interview with teacher</b>	April	Nerys	Charlie (and previous Year 3 teacher, Simon)	Sophie	Violet
<b>Interview with children</b>			Asma and Kadiye		
<b>Classroom observations</b>	1	2	7	6	4
<b>Discussion groups</b>		2	2	3	2
<b>Plans and schemes of work</b>		x	x	x	x
<b>Children’s written and drawn responses</b>	x	x	x	x	x

Figure 10: Data collected from school-based research (see Appendix 2)

I also accessed secondary sources, such as the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999) and 2014 (DfE, 2013), and various websites such as Pearson Education (an educational publishing corporation), Woodberry Downs School website, authors' own websites, Childline, and the Refugee Week website. Some quantitative data is referred to in the form of statistics obtained from the official school databases, with the permission of the school leadership, of the pupils' ethnicities and the languages spoken by them in each school at the time of my visits (see Appendix 3). These details are supplied by parents on the schools' admissions forms upon entry of the individual children, and are therefore not entirely reliable sources of data, being what parents choose to ascribe to their child. They also may be inaccurate due to lack of understanding of the categories and criteria, or parents' suspicion of the motives in gathering such data and the purposes to which it might be put. The same applies to details of country of origin (in practice not always declared), languages spoken and ethnicities of the children in each class, which were also drawn from the school database, ascribed by parents on admission, and supplied to me by individual class teachers (see Appendix 4). However these are the only statistics available about children's ethnic background, languages spoken, and country of origin (note that no parent put down UK in this category, only specifying when it is "other" than this).

### **4.3 Sampling procedures**

The process of collecting data to understand how *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* were used in the primary classroom was a "messy" one (Newby, 2010). When researching responses from refugees, a random sample would not be possible as such information is not in the public domain, and therefore the issue of gaining access is difficult. This is coupled with the fact that time is needed to build up trust and prevent against feelings of intrusion, particularly when looking for participants who are part of a stigmatised group. My sampling technique for the research is known as "purposive sampling" (Cohen, et al., 2005), as it "illustrates some feature or

process in which we are interested” (Silverman, 2010, p. 141), texts and participants being chosen for the light they could share on my overarching questions. This is also known as “theoretical sampling” (ibid, p. 143), where participants are selected according to criteria specified by the researcher and based on initial findings, such as in this study.

I have already discussed how I chose two books because they were suitable for different sections of the primary age-range, were well known and well-read in the sector, and could provide a comparative analysis of their genesis, interpretation and reception by the participants. I also deliberately selected two schools from an area which I knew would have high numbers of refugee children. Furthermore, both schools have a high proportion of children from both Somalia (relative to the overall population) and also from West Africa (see Appendix 3), which offered potential links with both *The Colour of Home*, focussing as it does on the experiences of a Somali boy, and *The Other Side of Truth*, which follows two Nigerian children from Lagos. Thus direct identification with the characters and stories in both books by members of each class might have been possible.

### **4.3.1 Out of school participants**

#### **4.3.1.1 Authors**

Interviewing the two authors was an exciting experience for me as a researcher, although I was somewhat in awe of them. However both authors’ distance from the actual lives of those they are portraying in their writing demonstrated their position as gatekeepers of the refugee experience, a position that they were both very much aware of. Initially I met Mary Hoffman at a conference on Children’s Literature and Diversity. I had asked her if I could interview her then and was very kindly invited to her home one weekend to conduct the interview. Her standing as a children’s author is considerable, and as one of my key informants the meeting was not without attendant significance. I interviewed Hoffman in her large and beautiful garden in Oxfordshire, a far cry from the primary schools in Enfield where the roots of

her story originated. However Hoffman was extremely helpful, answering all my questions at length, describing the research process she had undergone before writing the book, and providing me with intricate detail and examples of her creative process.

I had had previous professional contact with Beverley Naidoo, but met her again at the conference mentioned above and asked if I could interview her for my study. Months later we arranged to meet in the café of the National Theatre and although it seemed a fitting place to interview someone dedicated to the arts and radicalism, it is also a pillar of the London establishment, and so-called “high culture” (Williams, 1974). I observed in my field notes that it was

*“a place of literary and creative enterprise, not afraid to tackle controversial themes and “issues”. However, still a place that remains firmly rooted in mainstream middle class culture, where those with power and social capital feel comfortable.”*

While I interviewed her, Beverley came across as “a truly remarkable human being” as I noted in my research diary, her eloquence, speed of thought and wide reference to writers, thinkers and dramatists across cultures being enormously impressive, as she quoted projects and linked themes with ease, never stumbling or forgetting the details.

#### **4.3.1.2 Refugee education expert**

I also contacted Jill Rutter and asked to interview her, as she is one of the UK’s leading refugee education experts, and I had encountered her professionally when I was working as an EMAS teacher in School B in South East London. Furthermore, I noted that Mary Hoffman had contacted her at the early stages of writing *The Colour of Home*, and decided that her perspective on the two books in my case study and their efficacy in the classroom would be useful for my work. This is again an example of purposive sampling. We met in a community centre in the area of South East London close to where I had previously been teaching, also a significant venue, in that

it was local to the two schools in the study, but also home to a couple of refugee community organisations, and therefore very apt. Jill Rutter's views on the two books, but also the wider issues of teaching about refugee issues via the medium of literature and other arts, were invaluable, as was her general overview of refugee groups and trends, which only an expert in the field of refugee studies could supply.

#### **4.3.2 Overview of Schools**

Both schools chosen for the study were located in South East London and had a similar number of children on roll, School A recording 442 pupils in September 2012 and School B recording 465 pupils in January 2013 (see Appendix 3). From both schools I was provided with data from the official school database, about country of origin, languages spoken and ethnicities of the children on roll (previously mentioned). From this I could demonstrate the high ethnic mix of the schools and also attempt to assess the number of refugees or those from a refugee background who might be present in the school population. This is not easy, formal data about the immigration status of children when they enter the school not being asked for, as (rightly) this is considered an invasion of privacy. However Ofsted do require reporting on the number of refugee children when they inspect a school.

In practice, I knew from my time as an EMAS coordinator, that the calculation can only ever be an estimate, based on the country of origin of the child as declared by the parents on the admissions form. If a child has origins in a war-torn country known to generate refugees, perhaps with ethnic conflict and documented human rights abuses, it is presumed that the family will have entered the country seeking asylum. It is important to note that many children will not have actually experienced flight to safety themselves, being second generation refugees. However, the refugee experience can leave a long-term legacy, as discussed in Chapter 2, families being deeply affected by sudden loss, dislocation, homelessness, unemployment and social isolation. This impacts on the child, to a greater or lesser extent, possibly through news of

ongoing conflict and the arrival of family and friends from the country of origin fleeing persecution.

#### **4.3.2.1 School A**

As already stated, School A was chosen as being situated in an urban area of South East London, known to have a surrounding community high in ethnic minorities, containing many refugee families. This meant that it would be a particularly rich environment to collect data about the teacher's role and the interpretation of the text by children from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, many of whom would be migrants, and possibly refugees. The school also has a strong tradition of valuing diversity and welcoming new children, something that was a regular part of the school experience. April, the teacher I originally contacted there, had been a previous colleague elsewhere. Shortly after I gathered the data the school received a short Ofsted inspection which put them into the "Good" category. The sense of a school full of ideas and vitality had been palpable while I had been visiting, but now its progress was officially endorsed.

A breakdown of the ethnicities is shown in Appendix 3. Statistically significant data here is that 139 (just over 31%) of the school population identify as Other Black African. Some of these children may be refugees or from a refugee background, coming from places such as the Ivory Coast, Congo, or Rwanda. However many will not be refugees, for example most children coming from Nigeria, where there is little ethnic conflict, are in the UK while their parents study or have had a family reunion. Also of significance is that 20 children were identified as Somali, all of whom are likely to be from a refugee background, and 19 as Vietnamese (usually second or third generation refugees). This also does not take into account White European children who may also come from a refugee background, such as Kosovars or pre-accession Roma, from Bulgaria and Romania, also likely to have arrived seeking asylum.

However more information is revealed by looking at the languages spoken by children in the school (as shown in Appendix 3). Potential refugee children, or those with a refugee background, shown up here include 8 Albanian/Shqip speakers (possibly of families coming from Kosovo), 7 Pashto and Farsi speakers (probably from Afghan families), 5 Arabic speakers from Algeria, Yemen and elsewhere, and 5 Kurdish speakers. Furthermore, many of the 33 French speakers were from Francophone Africa, more likely to be from countries generating refugees as mentioned above, and the 16 Spanish speakers may well come from places in South America, such as Colombia where life is unsafe and factional strife has led many families to seek asylum in the UK. Adding all this data together, it is highly likely that, very roughly speaking, around a quarter of the children on roll in the school may live in families who are from a refugee background, not an insignificant number overall. This is borne out in class statistics about languages, ethnicities and countries of origin of the children, provided by all the teachers that I worked with (see Appendix 4).

#### **4.3.1.2 School B**

School B is to be found in a similar area to School A, sharing much in terms of ethnicities and languages spoken, drawing from a very mixed population, and with many refugee families. Furthermore I had worked at the school as an EMAS teacher 10 years previously and thus had some understanding of the school structures, and Nerys, the teacher I observed there, had been a colleague at the time. However, the ethos of the school had changed since I taught there, in that League Tables and SATS results are now prioritized, the school having achieved “Outstanding” in its Ofsted report and converting to an “Academy” in 2011. It was difficult to obtain overall figures of the ethnicities and languages spoken in School B, and this data was finally released, after much explanation of the purpose of my study and the anonymous nature of the data, in January 2013, a year and a half after my two visits. However there was no need to suspect that the demography of the school had changed significantly in this time and a breakdown of the school’s ethnicities is shown in Appendix 3. Statistically significant data here is the high number of Black

African children on roll (93) (although not as high as in School A), and following this, the 27 Somalis (more than in School A), and 6 Tamil children in the school.

As before, the data on languages spoken in the school revealed further useful information (shown in Appendix 3). As with School A, we can now see other refugee populations more clearly, relevant information being that there are 17 Albanian/Shqip speakers, families possibly coming from Kosovo, 13 Farsi speakers, probably from Afghan families, 7 Arabic speakers, potentially linked to areas of conflict, and 4 Kurdish speakers. As mentioned before, some of the French speakers from Francophone Africa may also come from refugee families, as with some of the Spanish speakers from South America. A rough rule of thumb, which is all that can be achieved here, would suggest again that around a quarter of the school population School B could be refugees, or children from a refugee background, and this is again borne out in class statistics (see Appendix 4).

### **4.3.3 Selecting teachers and classes**

The choice of teachers for this kind of exercise is important. Ideally they should be fairly knowledgeable about refugee issues, to manage questions and observations that might emerge in the reading. Furthermore, in order to deal with the subject matter suitably, the teacher needs to be sensitive to the perspective of refugee children in the class. Another study altogether could test the effectiveness of a teacher reading a book concerned with refugee issues to a class from a sympathetic point of view, contrasted with another teacher with a hostile view. Here we stray into the realm of ethics and I would feel uncomfortable asking any teacher without some background knowledge and empathy to embark on such a project. It is for these reasons that initially teachers were approached who were known to me as having a good understanding of the area and a positive attitude towards refugees. The research process began as “chain referral sampling” (Garson, 2012) or “snowballing” starting with a small number of relevant individuals who were then “used as informants to identify, or put the researcher in touch with, others

who qualify for inclusion and these, in turn, identify yet others” (Cohen, et al., 2005, p. 104). This is a particularly useful method when researching a sensitive topic, or where access is difficult, such as talking about refugee issues, and locating refugees for the research. I therefore followed opportunities that were offered, or that I created as I went along. I also wanted a representative spread *across* the age groups, as well as comparability between classes reading the books in the *same* age group, and the following account of the “snowballing” manner in which teachers were approached for my study has this potential.

#### **4.3.3.1 April - Year 1, School A**

As already mentioned, I started by contacting a former colleague, April, who was teaching a Year 1 class in a School A, to ask if she could read *The Colour of Home* (without me present) and then permit me to interview her. She chose to read the book as part of a loose PSHCE focus. After the reading she asked all the children to write and draw their favourite part of the book and gave their work to me to scrutinise. At first I was at a loss as to how to use this data and finally realised that it would be far better if I could visit and observe the session, talk to the children, collect the work generated in the session for analysis, and interview April after the event, which I was subsequently invited to do. April was very experienced in working in schools in South East London and had nearly 40 years of primary school teaching behind her. Furthermore, I had worked with her as a colleague when we had both been employed in School B. Our previous professional relationship meant that my presence in her classroom was something we were both used to.

#### **4.3.3.2 Nerys - Year 1, School B**

I was alerted to the fact that another former colleague, Nerys, also teaching a Year 1 class in School B, had been using *The Colour of Home* for several years in her classroom as part of the PSHCE curriculum. Nerys was also a very experienced class teacher, having been at School B for over 20 years, and holding various posts of responsibility, such as Humanities and Key Stage

1 Co-ordinator. Having worked with her before as well, I knew that she also had a strong commitment to social justice, and was keen to promote a welcoming ethos to migrants and refugees, and celebrate the variety of countries children had connections with, as was clear in her interview. I therefore contacted her to ask if I could visit her class when she was reading the book, to observe, talk to some of the children, conduct some group discussions and analyse the work produced from the session. I had acted as a support teacher in her classroom for several years, and we therefore both felt very comfortable with the arrangement. As it happened, I visited twice, as one session proved not long enough for the children to respond sufficiently to the text and this enabled me to record discussions with six children in two different groups (see Appendix 6 for groupings and questions). Nerys sent a letter home, employing the “opt out” method of obtaining parental consent, which was considered appropriate and sufficient by both schools, for me to record the group discussions (see Appendix 7 for copies of letters to parents). I was also given her lesson plan and the children’s work generated in the two sessions, and interviewed her after the visits.

#### **4.3.3.3 Simon and Charlie - Year 3, School A**

Soon after visiting Year 1 in School A, I became aware that children in Year 3 had been studying *The Colour of Home* as part of their Literacy lessons for three weeks, working with an EMAS advisor from an education authority in East London. I therefore revisited the school to interview the teacher of the Year 3 class, Simon, who had been at the school for a long time and was a well-respected class teacher. He also gave me copies of the scheme of work for three weeks of the Literacy curriculum, developed by the advisor and followed by him. He supplied me with sample worksheets, and children’s responses which the advisor had given him, to demonstrate the kind of work developing from this intervention.

The following year I returned to the school to gather data in Year 5 on *The Other Side of Truth* (see below), and discovered that Year 3 were focusing on *The Colour of Home* again in their literacy lessons, using the Local Authority

(LA) advisor's scheme of work as a basis for their study. This demonstrates the organic and "snowballing" methods mentioned earlier. I asked the current Year 3 teacher, Charlie, who was also the Literacy Co-ordinator, if I could observe some lessons over the three weeks, talk to the children, conduct some interviews and discussion groups, scrutinize the lesson plans and work generated, and interview him at the end. All this was agreed upon and permission to record interviews and discussion groups sought from the parents by letter (see Appendix 7). At times I sensed that the teacher was feeling stressed by my presence in the classroom, especially when pressures built up through various factors, such as class behaviour, planning expectations, and school-wide influences. However, I was able through my prior acquaintance with Mary Hoffman, the author, to set up a Skype interview for the class to ask her questions about her writing. The experience proved to be a rich one for Year 3, and providing the means for the Skype link was well appreciated as a form of reciprocity.

#### **4.3.3.4 Sophie and Violet - Year 5, School A**

As already mentioned, I returned to School A, after already interviewing two teachers in Year 1 and 3, because of my familiarity with the school, and its suitability for my research purposes. I contacted the school leadership team to request whether I could work with other teachers in order to gather data on *The Other Side of Truth*, the second book chosen as an example of an often-used text for the older primary age range, and even encountered in lower secondary classrooms. I was introduced to two Year 5 teachers, who had been told about my project and who were keen to take the task on. One of the teachers, Violet, had previously taught the book, and the other, Sophie, turned out to be a former student of mine when on her teacher training course. I was conscious that this might lead to difficulties in power relationships, due to our previous tutor/student dynamic, but in practice it proved to be a very fruitful partnership. Sophie was totally dedicated to the project, and threw herself into preparing excellent resources to make it work well, both from her own motivation and possibly a desire to help me in my work. As such, she took real ownership of the project, telling me in her interview that she had learnt a

lot as she went along. She was keen to talk after the lessons about what had taken place, and I valued the collaborative nature of our relationship as researcher and participant. She was also inspired to undertake her own MA in Education, stimulated by my research, which demonstrated an immediate impact of the study.

The two teachers agreed that I could observe some lessons over the course of 5 weeks studying the book, talk to the children, conduct some discussion groups (see Appendix 6), scrutinize the lesson plans and children's work generated, and interview them at the end. All this was agreed upon and permission to record interviews and focus groups sought from the parents, via the "opt out" method discussed above (see Appendix 7). Violet, did however suggest at one point that she felt somewhat under pressure from my presence in the classroom, and I was well able to sympathize as a former teacher myself. I reassured her that I did not expect anything extra to be prepared for the lessons, and kept my observations to a reasonable level, in respect for her well-being. I also arranged through my prior meeting with Beverley Naidoo, the author, for her to come to the school, run an assembly and visit classes for children to ask her about her writing. Again the benefit of this reciprocity was much appreciated by the school leadership, teachers and children, and meant that I had something to offer in return for allowing me such generous access.

#### **4.4 Data collection**

##### **4.4.1 Ethical Issues**

After the Second World War, following the appalling human experimentation in Nazi concentration camps, a set of research ethics was drawn up, called the Nuremberg Code (U.S. Government, 1949). This 10 point plan has formed the blue print for guidance in any studies where humans are subjects, and enshrines the principles of informed consent, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw and concern for dignity and comfort. All these elements were included in my data collection and made explicit to participants. However also relevant to my study, and particularly when gathering data from children, I

referred to the British Educational Research Association (BERA)'s "Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research" (2011), which adhere to the same fundamental precepts.

The idea that children have the right to give their own consent to participation in a study is an important one, and young people generally enjoy being part of an investigation which involves seeking their opinion. Coyne (2010) suggests that if parents act as gatekeepers to block young people's participation, it could be seen as a way of restricting children's ability to voluntarily take part in research. However, BERA also states:

*"In the case of participants whose age...may limit the extent to which they can be expected to understand or agree voluntarily to undertake their role...researchers must also seek the collaboration and approval of those who act in guardianship (e.g. parents) or as 'responsible others'"* (BERA, 2011, pp. 6-7).

For this reason, parental consent was sought via the "opt out" method, which was considered to be sufficiently rigorous by both schools (see Appendix 7). I was also sensitive in all my data collection not to cause distress to my participants, and made it clear before interviews and discussion groups that individuals were not obliged to participate and could leave at any time. Furthermore if respondents seemed in any way disturbed by the sensitive and emotional nature of the conversation, I made sure I changed the subject or the question, as noted in the BERA guidelines (2011).

#### **4.4.2 Interviews**

The initial interviews I conducted made me keenly aware of the pitfalls in considering them as entirely reliable sources of information, given as they are to interviewer bias, selective reporting, distorted power relationships and control between researcher and researched, dependent on the social skills of the interviewer and the obtaining of trust (Jones, 1985) (Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). I was also alerted to the problems engendered by simply asking respondents the research questions (Alasuutari, 1995) (Silverman, 2007), as I was not hoping to find out direct answers from them, but explore their

perception of the phenomenon I was investigating, and for this reason I preferred to conduct interviews in a semi-structured manner. I was careful not to offer my opinion if possible, but to follow up on areas that participants wanted to discuss in more depth, especially if they wanted to talk to me about their own and their family's histories and experiences of being refugees, a common occurrence I had discovered from interviewing people previously who had powerful stories to tell.

Most participants were given the questions in advance, except for the two children, for whom the interview was entirely free-flow, allowing them to talk about their lives and concerns as much as about the book. I transcribed the interviews as carefully as possible and sent them to the authors and teachers to read, with an option to contest them if necessary. Ochs (1979) writes in depth about the process of transcription as a filtering process in itself, and asserts "What is on a transcript will influence and constrain what generalizations emerge" (ibid, p. 44). I became aware during this phase of how much is missed in the transcription of an interview, particularly when interviewing children. Video would overcome this problem, but would have been far too intrusive for some of my interviews that touched on sensitive and personal subjects.

I chose to interview Asma and Kadiye in Year 1, School A, outside the classroom, as I wanted to find out how the two Somali children in the class felt about a book, featuring a Somali child, being shared in the classroom. Asma had been very vocal about her connection to the book while in the class, but Kadiye not so. At this time it struck me that the position of the visiting researcher, backed by the teacher and the school discipline structure holds enormous power, and the potential for intrusion. Hogan and O'Reilly (2007) make the point that children may feel unable to refuse or compelled to participate as a 'favour' to a gatekeeper whom they have a relationship with, and question at what age can children make informed decisions, while Hill (2005) notes that some researchers have rehearsed with children how they can say no. After this I decided that group discussions would be more beneficial in allowing children to warm to the questions I was asking, or opt out

of answering while others did, and foster collaboration in an enjoyable session, with an opportunity to have their voices heard if they wished (Souza, et al., 2013).

#### **4.4.3 Discussion groups**

I found that discussion groups (often called focus groups) were an excellent method for developing children's thinking about the books in question, where participants were encouraged to interact with one another (Wilson, 1997) building on the contributions of others. Rather than clouding the individual perspective, and negatively affecting each other's responses, the radical pedagogy of those such as Skidmore (2000) and Alexander (2008) suggest that dialogic engagement enhances children's ability to respond to ideas and debates. In the groups that I led, children had time to talk about the text in relation to their own lives, make connections with the wider world, and debate their opinions with peers. They were also visibly pleased to have their viewpoint sought in a realistic context, where I was hoping to find answers to important and sensitive questions, rather than merely testing their comprehension. Having two or three children in each group seemed the optimum number for them to build on each other's responses, and I preferred to conduct the discussion groups in a quiet space away from the classroom, although often this was impossible.

The 25 children in my discussion groups were deliberately chosen, in negotiation between myself and the teacher, to include those with a geographical connection with the story, and/or who may be refugees or have a refugee background. I also chose to take the children out in same-gender groups in Year 5, as during the discussion groups in Year 3, boys had tended to dominate in mixed groups and I wanted to ensure that all voices were heard, if children wanted to contribute (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). The discussion groups were 20 minutes to half an hour long, and were recorded and transcribed in full. I had to establish control at the outset, children finding it difficult to be serious when talking about such subjects, and also reacting to being recorded, especially in Year 3. However generally I operated an

informal style of questioning, and relaxed attitude, which reduced the power relationship between researcher and participants, typical in an individual interview (Wilson, 1997). I tried to include all participants, asking children for their opinion directly, but giving them the option not to say much if they chose, and also encouraging them to respect each other's contribution, but disagree with each other if they wanted to, value differing reading responses.

#### **4.4.4 Classroom observation – “making the familiar strange”**

The origin of this phrase, often quoted in discussion of research methodology comes from a German romantic poet, known as Novalis (Beiser, 1998). The idea is linked to Brecht's 'alienation' effect (Brooker, 1988), but is also part of Russian Formalist defamiliarization (Lemon & Reis, 1965), whereby 'making the familiar strange' is a process of reviewing surroundings and events which are so familiar that our perception of them has become dulled (Hawkes, 1977, pp. 62-67). As a researcher who was a former primary school teacher, I had much prior understanding of the field of investigations, but this can be a disadvantage, as over-familiarity can obscure elements of the data that a more distant observer might notice. Moreover I had been initially reluctant to go into schools and observe the reading of such texts in the classroom, as I felt that my presence would influence the response of the children, known as the “observer's paradox” or the “Hawthorn effect” (Newby, 2010, p. 122).

However, in-depth understanding of the “black box” of the classroom (Mehan, 1979), the demands and discontinuities of the school day, an understanding of educational terminology and jargon, and a working knowledge of the curriculum meant that I was able to recognise and locate touchstones as I went along. Furthermore the classroom is where the power of the “interpretive community” (Fish, 1980) was demonstrated, and insights gained into the role of influential adults in the reading process (Zimet, 1976) (Chambers, 1991).

Inevitably, this involved the cooperation of headteachers and teachers, and as already mentioned I was conscious of adding to the pressures of an already demanding job for both Year 3 and Year 5 teachers with my intrusion into the classroom. I was therefore extremely respectful, and grateful for the

opportunities provided, reciprocating by providing links with the authors. I also felt that it was easy for me to form relationships with children and staff as I knew how to approach them, and my manner led to me being easily accepted around the schools in which I carried out my observations. For many years I worked as an EMAS teacher, and as such I was used to being an uncritical supporter of the proceedings. However as a teacher educator part of my professional practice is to give feedback about the student teacher's pedagogy, and this can also be problematic in classroom observation for research purposes, as I was not there to coach and mentor, but to observe, evaluate and analyse. Conteh (2003) suggests that clearly articulated awareness of the subjectivities which a teacher/ or tutor/researcher brings to the situation, and which can be reflected in the responses of those around, is more useful than attempting the impossibility of objectivity.

#### **4.4.5 Curriculum documents, lesson plans and schemes of work**

Before beginning the data collection in schools, I revisited the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999) documents for Literacy and PSHCE at Key Stage 1 and 2, so that I was familiar with their parameters in advance of my class visits. Between gathering the data and writing up the thesis, the National Curriculum in England, 2014 (DfE, 2013) was revised so that changes to the Literacy part, and the removal of PSHCE as a discrete subject, replaced by a preamble about the value of Personal and Social Education (PSE), were considered. Before most lessons, the teachers gave me their individual lesson plans or schemes of work, except April, (a point that is discussed in Chapter 6) and I was also given a scheme of work devised by an LA advisor, previously mentioned. I greatly appreciated the teachers' generosity in sharing their hard work with me, finding these plans invaluable sources of data. Being able to relate the lesson plan, or scheme of work, to the actual lesson being rolled out in front of me, and then having access to children's work produced as a result, provided a unique view of the teaching and learning cycle, and how it related to my field of study. Online sources of planning for teaching the texts were further accessed, as discussed in the

relevant chapters, as this contributed to teachers' ideas and approaches, and gave me an insight into the origin of many lesson ideas.

#### **4.4.6 Children's responses**

In the two Year 1 classes I was given all the children's work, both written and drawn, generated in the one or two sessions I observed. Due to the more lengthy coverage of both books in Year 3 and Year 5, in School A, I was able to observe work in the making, both on paper (quotes from which I sometimes jotted down in my field notes) and in the form of small group drama sketches, which obviously provided greater depth. Sophie, one of the Year 5 teachers, also gave me a CD on which she had recorded children's role play work that I had been unable to view, such was her enthusiasm for me to access all useful responses. In both Year 3 and Year 5 I sampled a selection of children's work, from three children deemed to be of "lower", "middle" and "higher ability", a standard practice for assessment purposes, which demonstrated their written and drawn responses to both texts over several weeks of study. This provided insight into children's reactions to the books over time and across abilities, using a framework of reader response, completing the circuit necessary for the transactional process of reading to occur (Rosenblatt, 1978), and determining how "actual readers" (Iser, 1972, first published in English 1974) reject some ideas and "concretise" others within the text to make meaning (Iser, 1976, first published in English in 1978).

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

During my data analysis, I was looking for patterns emerging to "unriddle" suggested interpretations (Alasuutari, 1995). As an overall framework I have used grounded theory methodology (GTM), developed initially by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) to identify themes generated by the data. As a method it provides guidelines for data collection and analysis consisting of theoretical sampling, coding, comparisons between data, and memo writing. Originating in the 1960s in the United States (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), it advocates creating new theory consisting of

interrelated concepts rather than testing existing theories. In the case of my study, no other comparable work existed so exploring the area and developing new perspectives was an important factor in the research.

GTM works in a cyclical way, much like the hermeneutic cycle put forward by Gadamer (1979) to refer to a circular process of interpretation between subjective knowledge and objective experience. For research purposes this requires initial data being scrutinised to suggest the way forward for future data gathering, so that data collection and data analysis occur concurrently and inform each other. My previous work in the field and early analysis of my data indicated issues that I wanted to explore further and as described above, the sampling process was guided by this. Data gathering and analysis took place in a repetitive cycle of induction and deduction, consisting of collection of data and constant comparison between results and new findings in order to guide further data collections (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

#### **4.5.1 Coding and categorising.**

The first step of data analysis was to identify recurring themes and assign them a conceptual label to become a code, also known as a concept by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Initial or open coding helps to move away from particular statements to more abstract interpretations of the data (Charmaz, 2006). This is followed by more focussed selective coding in "the act of relating categories to subcategories along the lines of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Some codes or concepts will share the same or similar characteristics and can be pulled together into more abstract categories, which can be interlinked and build the basis for a theory or core category. 'Constant comparisons' between collected data, codes, categories and initial findings help to crystallise ideas to become part of the emerging theory. This was an important and lengthy part of the process whereby new data was constantly analysed in terms of the previous codes, and if new codes emerged they were combined and possibly redefined so that overall categories pertained to both sets of data satisfactorily.

#### **4.5.2 Comparing, memoing and presenting the data**

I undertook this process when comparing the aims and motivations of the two authors, the role of the teacher in mediating both books with different classes, and then children as readers of the same books in two classrooms. The initial data set in each case was coded and categorised to generate overarching themes, and then the comparable data set was analysed to see if it fitted these codes. If not, new codes were developed which either fitted existing categories, or a new category was devised to capture them. In my work, author interviews threw up themes such as “The Writing Process” and “Reader Response”. Teacher’s data could be categorised into “Planning for Reader Response/Critical Literacy”, “Mediating the Text” and “Negotiating the Curriculum”, and children’s responses seemed to fall into groups of “Text to World”, “Text to Self”, and “The Constructed Text”, although containing differing sub-headings concerning the two books. These categories will be explained in greater detail in the subsequent data analysis chapters.

In GTM this process runs concurrently with the practice of writing memos by the researcher, to provide a record of thoughts and ideas, enabling immediate reactions and reflection to occur. This was provided initially in my field notes, which not only recorded proceedings, but my thoughts about them. Memos can be used to ask questions, philosophise about potential meanings of interviewee's statements and compare concepts identified in interview transcripts to each other and to the literature. When transcribing, reading and coding the data, I kept parallel notes on thoughts generated by the analysis, which helped to inform the coding process itself, as well as feeding into an overarching synthesis that I would use in my discussion and concluding chapters. However GTM is very complex and time-consuming due to the lengthy coding process and memo writing as part of the analysis (Bartlett & Payne, 1997).

Generally my findings are displayed through “telling cases” (Mitchell, 1984) taken from all the data sets, often in the form of examples of children’s work or quotes from interviews, discussion groups, lesson plans and schemes of work,

as well as my field notes during classroom observation. Comment runs alongside these examples to integrate data presentation with analysis. I also present the statistical data concerning ethnicities, languages spoken, and country of origin of the children in both schools in Appendices 3 and 4, and refer to them when applicable in the body of the text.

#### **4.6 *Issues arising***

The aim of all qualitative research methodologies is to produce “trustworthy” evidence (Mishler, 1990) through a full description of the social world in which events took place, and a responsibility for interpreting these events. Francis (1993) argues that making procedural decisions explicit gives greater opportunities for the readers of the research to be able to judge if they can accept the final analysis as satisfactory. In fact Mishler (1990) prefers to use the word “validation” rather than “validity”, as he sees the final approbation being when other investigators use the results of the study in their own work. I have attempted to make my research methodology and procedures open and transparent in this chapter and hope that will lead to my work being of use to others in the field of children’s literature, refugee studies, or teaching about controversial issues in the classroom.

Problems with the use of a case study, as already discussed, are generalizability and application to other settings (Cohen, et al., 2005). Furthermore, the risk of “selective reporting and the resulting dangers of distortion” (Bell, 2010, p. 9) are issues to be aware of. Alasuutari (1995) also comments that qualitative research “... is not so much generalisation as extrapolation” (ibid, p. 155), a process of relating results to broader entities. This is highlighted in GTM as the difference between substantive and formal theory. Substantive theories provide a theoretical interpretation or explanation for a particular area or specific setting. Formal theories are more abstract and provide a theoretical framework which can be applied to a wider range of concerns and problems (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Charmaz (2006) points out that most grounded theories are substantive, as they are grounded in the data, and focus on particular problems in a specific area. In order for my work to

become more generally applicable, a more formal theory needs to be generated which each substantive theory can help to refine (Charmaz, 2006). I will attempt to do this in the concluding chapter, and suggest further studies that could be made.

## Chapter 5 – Two authors: Motivations and Aims

*“For Suleiman, Josè, Naima, Dagma, Flavia, Brunilda, Hagar; Jo, Hasna and all the others who had to leave their first homes and were brave enough to find new ones – M.H.”* (Dedication at the front of “*The Colour of Home*” by Mary Hoffman (2002))

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the first research sub-question:

- **What are the motivations of authors who write about the refugee experience for children? What are their aims?**

It is based on data from interviews with the two authors, Mary Hoffman and Beverley Naidoo, and includes excerpts from an interview with Jill Rutter, a refugee education expert and prolific writer in the field, (see Chapter 4 for details). During my visit to Hoffman’s house she gave me some additional roughs of *The Colour of Home* prior to publication, which I have used, and I also consulted the two authors’ own official websites for further biographical details.

### 5.2 Background to the authors

#### 5.2.1 Mary Hoffman

Mary Hoffman was born in 1945, grew up in Hampshire, and read English Literature at Cambridge University (Hoffman, n.d.). She is married to an Anglo-Indian and now lives in Oxfordshire, which is where I travelled to interview her in the beautiful garden she refers to in the biography on her website. Hoffman has had nearly 90 children’s books published to date. She focuses mainly on historical fiction, producing series of books in the same genre. She is also notable for writing picture books for the younger age group dealing with issues of diversity, such as *Amazing Grace* (1991), *Grace and Family* (1995) and *An Angel Just Like Me* (1997), discussed in Chapter 1. As she explained in the interview: “my children are of mixed race in that my

husband is half Indian.... they would talk about this sort of thing and I thought, 'you never see this in books'", leading her to tackle the position of those who vary from the norm of white, middle class, two-parent families.

Duffy (1995) suggests that it is the descendants of migrants, rather than migrants themselves, who write about the theme of exile (see Chapter 3), and from my initial research into the authors of the books for children about the refugee experience, I have observed that many have a connection with migration that is not immediately obvious (see Chapter 1). Hoffman, for example, explained to me that the theme of migration has reverberations both for her husband's and her own family, her great grandfather having migrated from Germany, being possibly Jewish, and experiencing racism on arrival in the UK. As such Hoffman is not a post-colonial writer herself, although her marriage has brought her close post-colonial connections, and her own family background contains experience of persecution.

### **5.2.2 Beverley Naidoo**

Beverley Naidoo has written significantly fewer books (Naidoo, n.d.), only six novels to date, plus ten picture books and collections of short stories. She has also published her PhD as a book, *Through Whose Eyes? Exploring racism: reader, text and context* (1992), discussed in Chapter 1. As already mentioned, her first three novels for children, and a collection of short stories were set in South Africa, with *Journey to Jo'burg* (1985) being banned there until 1991. After the 1994 transition to democratic elections in South Africa, Naidoo turned to writing about children from other African countries, both in terms of coming to the UK as refugees from Nigeria (*The Other Side of Truth* and its sequel *Web of Lies* (2004)), and taking a more historical perspective of life in colonial Kenya (*Burn My Heart*, (2007)), respectively.

In contrast to Hoffman, Naidoo was born into a white, middle-class family in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1943, and as such grew up under the repressive apartheid regime at the time, which materially benefited families such as hers. She graduated from the University of Witwatersrand in 1963,

but at the age of 21, was detained without trial for eight weeks in solitary confinement for her activities in the anti-apartheid movement. After this she fled to the UK in 1965, becoming a refugee herself, and was unable to return to her homeland until 1993. Although she acknowledged this pre-migration experience in common with her characters:

*“it was only later when I came to look back ... and thought that indeed I had come from South Africa as a refugee, but being white, as having this colour skin I was not regarded as a refugee”,*

she was careful to differentiate her treatment in her post-migration situation.

*“I didn’t experience the hostility that I would have experienced as a black South African coming in ... and I wasn’t experiencing racism, but nevertheless there was the element of disconnection anyway...”*

Living in exile in the UK, and undertaking a degree at York University, she felt that although she was there in body, for the first two years at least her mind was back in South Africa, where her brother was in prison and her friends were being arrested for their anti-apartheid activities. In this way she had a direct connection with Sade, the protagonist in the book, having experienced the same dislocation from the past and disconnection from the present.

*“I didn’t actually realise it at the time that I was writing Sade’s flashbacks, I just knew that she was going to have flashbacks. And it was only, you know, rationalising it later, and then realising, hold on, isn’t that what I myself did, you know, when your head is somewhere different from where your body is?”*

This direct experience had therefore stood her in good stead when it came to the “aesthetic” side of her writing, as envisaged by Rosenblatt (1978), and is unusual amongst writers about the refugee experience for children, as we have already seen in Chapter 1.

Naidoo has other aspects which may also qualify her as a “post-colonial” writer, coming from South Africa as she does, although as previously discussed, there is debate about whether a white South African can fully

appreciate the situation of those oppressed by the colonial legacy, a debate that Naidoo enters into herself. Pinsent (2005, p. 204) points out:

*“Her fiction is more strongly politicized than that of many children’s writers, perhaps because her identity as a white South African did not allow her to shirk the issue of inequality.”*

This may be a factor, but it is worth observing here that many white South Africans were (and still are) adept at shirking these issues, and being a white South African does not automatically politicise a person. However Naidoo’s family had yet more migration in their history from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Naidoo, 2009), her father moving from Cornwall where tin mines were closing, to South Africa where gold was being discovered, and her mother’s family fleeing the pogroms against Jews in Russia and thus experiencing persecution themselves. Furthermore her husband, whose name she has taken, was also a South African exile, of Indian origin, which poses interesting parallels with Hoffman, as both women have chosen to embrace “difference” in their marriages, a fact that is not without significance.

### **5.3 Debates and dilemmas**

#### **5.3.1 Giving voice to the voiceless**

We move on from this initial biographical comparison, to address the question, tackled already in Chapter 3, about the need for writers to have a lived connection with their field, or not. In writing about the refugee journey, a situation that she has no direct experience of, Hoffman could be said to be “speaking for the subaltern” (adapted from Spivak (1988) and discussed fully in Chapter 3), a position that she was clearly conscious of. However Spivak’s case is that if no one were to speak for the subaltern, their voices would not be heard. This is also Hoffman’s position when she talked about being commissioned to write the book (discussed more fully later):

*“I was the person who was asked. What should I say? “Oh no, I don’t think I should do that. I think you should wait until a refugee is ready to do it”? It’s a question of, “Do we need the book, or not?”*

She mentioned that it takes time for refugees to contemplate or be in a position to author a book, particularly in a second language to their own, and especially a children's book, which maybe outside their cultural domain (King, et al., 1995). Hoffman has also been criticised for writing about the black experience, while not being black herself, and therefore colonizing the field yet again (cf. hooks (1990)). This has particularly been the case for her *Grace* series, but as she said in her defence:

*"I can't change the facts. I'm not black, you know, and obviously I can't write with quite the insight, but I think that a combination of doing the research, having my heart in the right place, and being, I hope, a writer with a gift to put it across, makes up for the fact that I'm not actually from that culture."*

Naidoo felt strongly that it was important to encourage people with the refugee experience to write:

*"that's an important political issue, and we should be looking to see ways in which that could be..., because we could all benefit. We would all gain from hearing those voices."*

However she has stated elsewhere (Naidoo, 2004) that being challenged about her credentials as a white writer writing about the black experience was in fact a form of racism in itself:

*"To judge work in terms of the so-called racial classification of the author is a backward step. It confirms the racialization of experience and imagination" (ibid, p. 6).*

When asked in the interview if she saw her outsider viewpoint as a problem, Naidoo gave a fierce defence of the writer's responsibility and integrity, pointing out that without this, much of literature would not exist.

*"I mean, can we never write a novel about the 16<sup>th</sup> century because we haven't lived then? Can men never write about women, and women about men, you know, adults about children?"*

However she did recognise her own limitations when she conceded that she hadn't felt able to base the whole novel in Nigeria, having only visited the country for one weekend. "I wouldn't have dared to attempt that."

Nevertheless it could be argued that both books are postcolonial texts, if the focus is that of subject rather than author (see Chapter 3.) Both fit the description of dealing with children from a post-colonial situation, in Somalia, Nigeria and in the UK. In contrast, both authors could be seen as mouthpieces of the refugee experience for children, drawing on their imagination, their research, and their credentials as a writer to explore and distil a situation for others. Both writers felt strongly that the lived experience of the writer is irrelevant, and that it is the quality of the writing which is the issue in any literary effort, as Naidoo put it:

*"to research, to use their craft, to use their imaginations, to imagine. You know, a lot of craft goes into it, and we have to learn our craft."*

In fact all three interviewees (Rutter included) acknowledged that someone who had been through the refugee experience, although being able to claim more authenticity, would not necessarily write a better book than an experienced writer describing the events, and that the book should be judged on its literary merits and potential to engage the reader (see again discussion of migration literature in Chapter 3). This would relate back to the school of New Criticism, discussed in Chapter 3, founded by F.R Leavis, which considered the text as paramount and the biography of the author as irrelevant. Hoffman gave backing to this view:

*"When the book is in the classroom, nobody knows anything about the writer."*

However this is not altogether true, as books often give some background information on the author, especially if the text is an autobiography or diary of that experience. Similarly, teachers, when introducing a text in the classroom, often draw children's attention to other books written by the same author, as adults do when discussing their reading matter on an informal basis.

### 5.3.2 Issues-based literature and “heavy” themes

In this study I have already raised questions about the role of “issues based” literature, dealing with controversial issues such as war, the Holocaust and racism (see Chapter 1). I have also looked at texts as ideological tools (Hollindale, 1988) (Stephens, 1992), the teaching of literature as a political activity (Habib, 2008) and the nature of the publishing industry. Rutter talked in her interview about the problem she saw with “taking an issue and trying to kind of spin a story around it...” as she felt Benjamin Zephaniah had done in *Refugee Boy* (2001). She felt the same genesis tainted *The Colour of Home* as well, as Hoffman “had the issue first and, and the story came afterwards.” In contrast, she had observed that *The Other Side of Truth* had been arrived at via the story to the wider issues, and for her this made the book a far more powerful tool for stimulating classroom discussion.

At a conference on Children’s Literature and Diversity I attended in 2006 (already mentioned) where Naidoo was speaking, her books were referred to as “issues” books. When I asked in her interview if Naidoo considered her work to be “issues-based” she became very animated and replied:

*“Absolutely not. Would you say to Nadine Gordimer, what issue have you got in this book? No, we don’t do this with adult writers. It’s something very peculiar when it comes to children’s literature. And I don’t know why it is. Maybe it’s because of the world of education and in some way we’ve got to categorise it.”*

While some writing is far more overt in its intentions, Beverley Naidoo is resistant to over-explicit ideology, and is keen to distance herself as an “issues” author, despite Hewings and Watson (2009) describing her as

*“having a writing and speaking career that has been defined by an effort to draw children into political engagement...within a long tradition of moral-political fiction produced for children”* (ibid, p. 330-1).

In contrast Naidoo states: “I do not write to deliver a ‘message’” (2009, p. 340). She prefers the term “witness literature” (Naidoo, 2004) following the

descriptor of the celebrated South African writer Nadine Gordimer, as “a genre of circumstance or time and place” (Gordimer, 2002, p. 6) where the writer, although not necessarily part of the culture about which they are writing, bears witness to the experiences of those caught up in a specific time of historical significance. It could be said that her work is the collective story of a ‘significant life experience’ through one mediator who testifies or bears witness, as a “testimonial novel” (Bickford, 2008, p. 133). Naidoo echoes this by explaining that in witness literature “its stories and characters are umbilically connected to their wider society” (Naidoo, 2004, p. 4). Thus the strong link with real-life contemporary events which fuelled the writing, leading to: “the moral dilemmas, questions at the core” (ibid, p. 4). This intertextuality is key to Naidoo’s work, as already discussed.

Much has been written about *The Other Side of Truth* in a variety of arenas. In a chapter entitled “Languages, Genres and Issues: The Socially Committed Novel” (Pinsent, 2005, p. 192), Naidoo’s narratorial stance, through the eyes of Sade, and the use of “intertextuality” in the use of traditional tales and allusions, as well as letters, is seen to give weight to her ideological agenda. Elsewhere, in a chapter called “Radical Agendas” which considers *The Other Side of Truth* at length, it is heralded as “an exemplum of social realist fiction with a political agenda” (Hewings & Watson, 2009, p. 330), pointing out that her writing is part of a long tradition of moral-political fiction produced for children, although with different agendas to that of the past. Giles (2009) posits that writers like Naidoo attempt to stimulate “critical literacy” among their readership, a concept I have discussed fully in Chapter 3, where she challenges her readers to ask questions, “showing not telling”, and hopes that her books will “disrupt assumptions and beliefs that are otherwise taken for granted without reflection” (ibid, p. 344).

Another area of criticism levelled at books about the refugee experience for children, sometimes by my own students, is that they deal with “heavy” themes that are too old for the age-group, and could be distressing for children to read about. Rease (2004) tracks *The Other Side of Truth* to the psychological condition known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sometimes found

in refugee children, and finds close similarities throughout the book, while Paul (2009) notes the grim realism depicted in the “jarring class and race divides that set Sade’s comfortable, middle-class experience of home in Nigeria apart from the uncomfortable experience of exile in England” (ibid, p. 97). Reynolds (2005) suggests that there are tensions inherent in “socially committed” (ibid, p. 191) children’s literature between the preservation of innocence, naivety and optimism about the future, and developing social understanding. However Rutter felt in her interview that much writing for young children contains violent and frightening elements, a point that Bettelheim (1976) and many other commentators on children’s literature since have noted, and she argued that this was not a reason for “shying away” from certain books.

Naidoo held the view that children are exposed to violence on television and in video games, but do not actually confront the reality of blood and gore in armed combat, and the consequences of it for human beings’ lives. “It’s not a game.” She felt that out of a better understanding came positive action for change, led by young people to influence their future.

*“If we don’t open out to young people, to keep them sheltered from it, how do we ever help them to think “what do we do about it?” Yes, I can understand when that young person says, well I’m going to go and I’m going to boycott this or I’m going to do that, to feel a release and that actually coming together we can deal with it.”*

In fact, contrary to those who felt that optimism was quelled by too much knowledge, she suggested that with more information, children and young people can be positive about their part in shaping the future, perhaps by helping to bring peace in the Middle East, as she gave as an example, which links to social action or “praxis” advocated as part of critical pedagogy by Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987), see Chapter 3.

### 5.3.3 Trauma discourses and the concept of resilience

Both authors were very aware of the concepts of trauma and resilience, and spoke about them in their interviews. When Hoffman summarised the story in her initial synopsis to the publisher, she wrote:

*“It is about the adaptability of human beings and their resilience and willingness to start again when life has dealt them an appalling hand.”*

Although she mentioned trauma at one point in the interview, it was only a fleeting reference and she quickly reverted to the theme of resilience.

*“I thought it was just right to do it this way, to show just how awful an experience could be, and how traumatising, and yet how you could recover from it.”*

She also displayed awareness of the potential refugee reader at this point and felt the book had a positive message for them too. She had wanted to find a way of saying

*“you can have an experience like this and come through it, and survive and life doesn’t end.”*

Naidoo, however, was more focussed on the discourse of trauma and mentioned it several times in the interview. She had researched the work of psychologists writing about how children deal with trauma, and understood from this that those who had an intellectual framework in which to place their experiences could deal with them better. In her interview, she spoke constantly about the power of imagination, taking her readers on a journey, entering into the lived-experience of others, as if hoping that she would engender vicarious feelings in those readers who have not been in such situations. Here the language of trauma ultimately gives way to the concept of resilience, again when contemplating the refugee reader:

*“These are the most extraordinary upsetting, terrible experiences, traumatic. These children have been traumatised, never see themselves reflected anywhere in the media, in a way that they recognise themselves... You know, these children have gone through*

*traumatising experiences, and I think we have to be sensitive to their trauma. But what we can draw on is the strength of character in these young people.”*

The book ends amongst the backdrop of Papa’s continuing asylum claims, and Naidoo has two conflicting aims here. On one hand, she strives to portray resilience, as she said in her own words:

*“I think that what I’ve always felt a big responsibility is that I have to bring my characters through, my main characters through, so that at the end of the novel, they have to survive.”*

On the other hand she also is careful to show that refugee children’s problems are not all over once they reach the host country, and that their struggles continue in the post-migration ecology on many levels.

## **5.4 The writing process**

### **5.4.1 Motivation, purpose and aims**

As a result of the perspective of “difference” in her writing, Hoffman outlined that Frances Lincoln, the well-known but recently deceased publisher, had approached her with a very simple brief: to write a picture book about the refugee experience. This is significant in that from the outset *The Colour of Home* was commissioned, rather than organic in its conception. Hoffman explained that she had not discussed the message or purpose of the book any further with the publisher, and was left to her own devices to find her way of meeting the requirement. She was very clear in her own head of the dual purpose of her enterprise:

*“I think it seemed obvious to me that the purpose was to write about the asylum seeker experience for two reasons, so that asylum seekers could see themselves reflected in a book, which they weren’t at the moment, and that those who were not asylum seekers, could understand what the asylum seeker experience was, because there was a lot of negative press, and indeed negative action from the government at that time about asylum seekers, and I thought the most important thing really is for people who are not in that situation, to put*

*themselves imaginatively in that situation, and see what it would take to uproot you from everything you knew.”*

Not only was she aiming to validate the lived experience of refugee children, but by stimulating the imagination she hoped to foster empathy and change negative attitudes, the latter being stated by her as “the most important thing really”. This duality of purpose with regards to *The Colour of Home* was stated in the initial synopsis for the book submitted to the publisher in 1999, a photocopy of which Hoffman gave to me. Her proposal starts with the statement:

*“It is felt very much in the UK, and doubtless in other European countries and the USA, that there is a need for picture books featuring refugees. As usual, I do not want to write a “situation” book, but rather to use story as a method of reaching out to individuals who find themselves in a particular set of circumstances. If the book can also help to promote understanding and dispel stereotypes in readers from the society into which refugees have fled, so much the better.”*

We have several ideas within the statement. Hoffman claims to identify a need for a refugee picture book, but as we know from her interview, the vision came from her publisher, rather than her. It therefore could be suggested that the need does not arise from refugee children themselves, from non-refugees in the early primary phase, or from an author wanting to write about such an area, but from the publishing industry itself, and could therefore be filling a niche in the market, rather than stemming a gap in children’s own literary experience. In this way, children’s literature is far more complicated than that for adults, which has to appeal only to the potential reader, rather than an intermediary who identifies what is in the best interest of the reader base (Rose, 1984) (Chambers, 1991), discussed in Chapter 3.

Naidoo’s motivation was different. Having already written three books from the point of view of Black South African children, she was influenced by two major political events which made her change tack in her work. In 1990 Nelson Mandela was released from jail and the country began slowly to move toward full universal suffrage. As Naidoo explained in her interview:

*“1994 was the date of the first democratic elections, when he was elected President, and I began to think: ‘Do people think of me as someone who could only write about South Africa?’ And I thought, no, this isn’t so. I can find as dramatic stories, right here in the country where I am living, and I thought well I’m going to do that. It’s going to open up for me and I immediately knew that the characters were going to be refugee children.”*

Having written so graphically about the effects of apartheid on children’s lives, she felt, as that brutal system came to an end, that she would look elsewhere for stories that would challenge injustice. Naidoo’s aim was more subtle in its explanation:

*“I’m always interested in what’s hidden and what isn’t immediately obvious and so I knew there would be interesting stories to tell from the refugee perspective, because they are the people who are invisible...”*

When asked if she intended the book to have a message or a purpose she became almost angry, probably because this is a question which she has to respond to continually.

*“No, I never write for a message or a purpose, because otherwise wouldn’t I rather be a journalist, wouldn’t I rather be a propagandist, wouldn’t I rather get up on my soap box in Hyde Park corner?”*

Naidoo’s (1992) theoretical framework for her own thesis is based on the transactional theory of Rosenblatt (1938). She constantly uses the metaphor of the writer taking the reader on a journey, engaging in asking questions and exploring what it is to be human at a certain time and point in history, or contemporary society. A further concept that she is wary of is the possible “impact” of her writing on her readers, as lacking in the reader/writer transaction.

*“Obviously one hopes people are going to go away and think at a very deep level and they are going to be affected, engage and that there are going to be questions raised.”*

### 5.4.2 Influences on the writer

After being approached by the publisher, Frances Lincoln, Hoffman explained that she thought back to two autobiographical pieces that were written for her when she was Writer in Residence in 1997, as part of the European Year Against Racism. About the first one she said:

*“There was a little boy from Zaire whose major preoccupation had been that he had to leave his dog behind. He was a refugee or an asylum seeker....But he, all his emotions about what had happened to him had been focussed on being separated from this dog, and he was looking forward to getting another dog here.”*

The story about the dog, became the basis for Hassan’s cat Musa, who he misses desperately in the finished book. In her initial proposal for the book, she had wanted to write about a Black African boy, but also a Muslim, and had therefore to change the dog to a cat, as she became aware that to “to a Muslim family, a dog is an unclean animal”.

The other piece of writing was by a Somali boy, a copy of whose work Hoffman gave me at the time of the interview:

*“When I was little I lived in Somalia with my mum, dad, two brothers, two sisters and three cousins in a big house in a big village. The village had one main road. We had 3 cars. My uncle killed a fox with his car. One very hot day the soldiers came to fight. They came in trucks. Came guns. It was noisy. I hid in my brother’s room. They stopped fighting. My family got in they (sic) cars and went to another country. The first time we tae (sic) to England they wouldn’t let us.....and the second time...us stay. I felt shy because I didn’t speak English. I went to school then I learned” (some parts illegible).*

It is interesting to note that this extended family lived in a big house and owned three cars, which they used for their escape, while Hassan’s family travel for miles on foot. As already discussed in Chapter 2, many refugees come from urban environments, where they have lived wealthy lives by comparison to their country folk, and only experience poverty and overcrowding when arriving in the post-migration context.

Hoffman decided to choose a Somali subject as she was aware of the imminent publication of another picture book “*Petar’s Song*” (by Pratima

Mitchell (2004)), mentioned in Chapter 1, dealing with an Eastern European refugee, and wanted to contrast with it by choosing a Black African child as the subject.

*“I’d not settled on which African country he comes from, and I said I wanted it to be an actual named country, not just a vague amalgam of African countries”.*

Researching statistics on asylum seekers and refugees showed her that one of the highest numbers of non-white asylum-seeking groups in the UK and the US (after Hispanics) were Somalis, and in order to satisfy both markets, she decided to make the protagonist Somali. Here we can see a link with the schools of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, referred to in Chapter 3, where literature reflects historical circumstance, and real-life events of the non-literary arena. It also demonstrates the power of the publishing market in defining content and form.

Similarly, *The Other Side of Truth* is set in an identified African country, locating its action from the outset in the chapter heading as “Lagos, Nigeria” (as already stated). Aimed at an older age-group it has scope for giving more context to the political situation in Nigeria at the time of the book, describing General Abacha, Commander-in-Chief, and his generals as operating a corrupt regime. Naidoo (2009) describes in detail the process and influences that went into her deciding on the subject matter of the book. As a keen follower of African politics, Naidoo was also moved by the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa, already mentioned in the summary of the plot. The book opens on the Monday after his execution, and Naidoo researched newspaper articles at the time, providing one of the examples of “intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1966) which makes the novel so rich and real. In fact Naidoo classes herself as a special kind of writer, who is influenced directly by historical events:

*“This is living history in a way. Writers like myself, who write out of real life, we’re writing about those real situations. Yes, we are drawing on a very rich fabric of reality.”*

At university in the UK, Naidoo met a PhD student who was one of the first lecturers from the University of Ife, in the North of Nigeria, and befriended him and his wife, with whom she has maintained a lifelong, family friendship. As part of “the Soyinka generation” (Wole Soyinka is a Nigerian writer and political activist) and the newly emergent left-wing Socialist party, this friend was elected a senator in Nigeria, but then left for the UK as a refugee, after surviving an assassination attempt and becoming disillusioned by the deep corruption in Nigerian politics. As such, I asked her if this man was the prototype for Sade and Femi’s father in the novel, and although she felt that basing a character on one person was “just too constricting”, she acknowledged that the family had given her a sense of

*“a family at a certain class level in Nigeria, and a certain cultural background, highly educated, tremendously valuing education, valuing traditional culture, which had a very strong moral framework, which believed ... that we should tell the truth, ...”.*

Moreover this middle class, educated and politicised family had functioned as advisers and editors on an informal basis during the writing of her book.

### **5.4.3 Research prior to and during writing**

Hoffman had undertaken extensive research when writing the book, “far more than you would expect to do for a picture book”. In order to deepen her understanding of the circumstances of forced migration, she had attended a weekly drop-in centre and lunchtime club for refugees and asylum seekers at a Homeless Action unit, befriending and mixing with the refugee women she met there. As she went into detail about the lives of the families she had met in the two places, she displayed an in-depth knowledge of the asylum process, as well as being privy to many details of the refugee experience, and had gathered a wealth of stories, which served to add clarity and incident to her book.

*“I made particular friends among these people. And of course they were waiting for decisions on their leave to remain, so sometimes people would get a letter, I mean some people had been waiting for*

*seven years, that sort of thing. But sometimes you'd be there when they got a letter, they would tell you, and that would make you very happy for them, but it would make the other asylum seekers very agitated and tearful sometimes as well."*

One Somali woman's story in particular had formed the basis of the journey taken by the family in *The Colour of Home* as they had left their home and gone to Mogadishu, taking a boat to Mombassa where they were in a refugee camp for some time, long enough to conceive and bear her third child. The precipitating factor that made them leave was that the daughter of a neighbour had been raped by soldiers, but obviously this was not included in the picture book. However Hoffman's original intention had been to depict Hassan's life in the Kenyan transit refugee camp in greater detail, using details told to her in the drop-in centre.

*"I wanted to show was that there were a lot of... because this was one of the things she and other people who had been in camps told me about..., that a lot of children were separated from their parents, and a lot of parents were separated from their children, and I wanted to have a situation in which families who had lost their children took in children who had lost their parents."*

She also stressed how it had taken time to build up the trust of the women in the group and for these stories to emerge, the research requiring more of a personal commitment than originally intended and engaging her emotionally. Nevertheless such interaction had made her acutely aware that asylum seekers were often wealthy people in their home country and that the contrast with their present situation was often hard to deal with.

*"When you are an asylum seeker or refugee, your life gets stripped down to the basics... They were women who had homes of their own, houses of their own, you know and it strips you of your pride."*

Although she did not visit Somalia as part of her research, Hoffman also sought out a Somali women's group, and talked to four women to find out more details of Somali culture and family life. She gave the roughs of the book to the Somali women to look over, clearly sharing the enterprise here.

In contrast, Naidoo's own South African background might have helped her understanding of Nigerian life. Living in a continent for 21 years is a vastly different experience to visiting for a short research trip or holiday, and although South Africa is geographically further from Nigeria than Britain, I would posit that it has more in common, culturally, socially and economically. When researching the book, Naidoo visited Nigeria for a weekend, but also had many Nigerian friends to draw on for inspiration and advice. During her time in the country she was shown around by Nigerian friends, taking pictures, literally and mentally. She also felt that the attitude of the author to their research was important in compounding authenticity:

*"It depends how open you are to something, you can spend twenty, fifty years in a place and not actually really live it at all. You could spend a weekend in a place and thoroughly live it."*

Furthermore, she went to visit Rutter, then working as Education Officer at the Refugee Council, already having thought that she would write about two children arriving as refugees from Nigeria, but deciding after the meeting that they would arrive as UASs, Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers, as the official term is known. She also made it her business to go behind the scenes of the UK Border Agency at Heathrow Airport, to a detention center in Oxfordshire, and to Lunar House in Croydon, where the Immigration and Nationality Department orchestrate the asylum process, asserting "it was vital to me not to be accused of fabrication" (Naidoo, 2009, p. 338). Alongside this she continued visiting many schools in her capacity as children's author, and talked to refugee children where she could, demonstrating an active interest in addressing the refugee perspective. In a final twist of "life acting upon literature" (Naidoo, 2009, p. 340) as she went to accept the Smarties Silver Award for the book, Naidoo heard the shocking news of Damilola Taylor's death, an Angolan refugee boy murdered on his way home from Peckham Library, a relevant area in the novel. As a result she asked for the dedication of the book to be made to him, and organised an ongoing donation of 10p to the Refugee Council from every book sold.

#### 5.4.4 The editing process

Hoffman provided me with a unique opportunity to scrutinize the editing process at close quarters, as she gave me photocopies of her initial proposal for *The Colour of Home* and the subsequent roughs of the text. This meant that I could see at firsthand how her initial ideas changed and became modified through a series of drafts, and gave me the chance to observe whether her original objectives and aims were met in the final production. Her first synopsis is in note form, pulling out certain themes, such as a reference to the colours of Somalia as “a lost paradise”, and contrasting them to those of the UK. The prayer mat as a motif of continuity, and the dog (later becoming a cat), as a symbol of loss are in the original brief, but also elements which were subsequently watered-down or edited out, such as families becoming separated in transit, and a new baby not surviving the journey.

Hoffman then showed me five different drafts of the text, some hand-written and some in type. The most important change that takes place is the move from using first person in the first two drafts, to the use of third person in the following versions, beginning with the voice of the teacher, naming Hassan, and locating him as from Somalia, on the first page. As Hoffman explained in her interview, she was encouraged to do this by her editor, who felt it (paradoxically) made the text more personal. The first person testimony starts in Somalia and tells the story chronologically. Once the story has moved to that of Hassan, and told through the authorial narrative voice, we meet him first in a British classroom being introduced to the class, and struggling to cope, while making the audience privy to his thoughts, and only encounter the first part of his story later through his conversation with the translator.

The editing process for *The Other Side of Truth* was not laid out to me in a series of drafts, However in an essay entitled: *A Writer's Journey: Retracing The Other Side of Truth* (2009), Naidoo writes up much of the background information about her history and life that she gave me in her interview, discussing her reasons for turning from South Africa as a subject, to Nigerian children arriving as refugees in the UK. She then details her researching and

editing process, describing how her thoughts evolved, as depicted in a series of notebooks, as phrases, words and sketches.

## **5.5 Authors' perspectives on reader response**

I would now like to turn to a final aspect of the authors' motivations and aims in producing these texts, with specific reference to reader response. In this section I will look at parts of both interviews relating specifically to my overarching research question, "What role can children's literature play in understanding and validating the refugee experience?" I have divided this section into two: firstly looking at how the authors saw refugee children responding to the text (the validating aspect) and secondly what they saw non-refugee children's response might be (understanding the experience). This also links to Iser's (1972, first published in English 1974) notion that there is a dichotomy between the "actual reader" and the "implied reader" and there may be a lack of attention to the fact that while many readers will have the same "identity theme" (Holland, 1975) as the implied reader, others may not. It is consideration for these readers, perhaps refugees themselves, who come to the text with life experiences that may be similar to the characters within the books, which I will examine first.

### **5.5.1 Refugee children as readers**

When Hoffman was asked if she had had any feedback about the book, she spoke only of teachers and researchers who had given positive comments. How to garner response is a challenge for any writer, particularly if the book is targeted at young children, but it is still possible to discover their reactions to the story, rather than relying on teachers and other interested parties. When I asked Hoffman how she thought refugee children would react to the book, particularly if they had been through a similar experience to Hassan, she stressed the potential catharsis that such literature might provide:

*"I hope that it would enable them to talk about their experience to somebody, as Hassan did in the story. Because he had all these*

*nightmarish images in his head, and he was very blocked, and very unable to take part in what was going on in the school because of that.”*

Here we can see a reference to the “talking therapy” suggested by some trauma theorists, as mentioned in Chapter 2. Pertinent also is the idea of “bibliotherapy”, coined by Crothers (1916) and meaning the therapeutic use of the written word, but further refined by Shrodes (1950) as including identification, catharsis, and insight. When asked about whether such literature has the potential to upset and disturb refugee children, she again relied on her own personal opinion:

*“You’ve got to find a way of assimilating these experiences into their own psyches, otherwise we’re going to end up with some very disturbed people as adults, indeed. And just to think that it’s OK to talk about it to someone, and hopefully a sensitive primary school teacher would be saying, ... giving the opportunity to talk about these things, and if necessary getting in an interpreter if the language wasn’t there. If there is a reaction of upset to the story, it would be a healthy one because it would sort of ... allow the wounds to heal more cleanly, in a way, than if you never talk about it and it festers.”*

Her evidence for thinking this relied on the absence of complaints by teachers, rather than any positive accounts of children opening up as a consequence of her writing:

*“I’ve not had anybody write to me and say I wish you hadn’t written that book, or I use it in the classroom and it upset the children.”*

However, it is worth questioning whether classrooms full of children are the best places for this kind of therapy to be enacted. Perhaps the public nature of introducing children’s literature about refugees in the lesson-time is not the best forum for such catharsis.

Naidoo, in contrast, had some evidence of reader response in the form of communications she had received from child readers. This of course is mainly due to the fact that her book targets an older age group, who are more likely and able to express their reactions to a text. However I had the sense during the interview that she was more actively interested in getting feedback from

her readers on this topic, and was more aware of the refugee reader as an “actual reader.”

*“I had an extraordinary letter from a little boy on “Web of Lies”,(the sequel to *The Other Side of Truth*) an eleven year old child in Islington, who said “how do you know, how do you know me? How can someone like you write, you know....? This is me. And I subsequently made it my business to find the school to go into it to meet this child.. And indeed I suspect he was going to go through many of Femi’s experiences.”*

When I asked her if she thought she might have helped him in any way, her characteristic humility came through once again: “How do I know? How do I know?” In common with Hoffman, Naidoo felt that her book would not be disturbing for refugee children if read in the classroom:

*“There’s been a debate as to whether you should introduce stories about refugees in schools that have got refugee children... And I think you, you should...My experience tells me, shows me that refugee children themselves will see a story as being about another refugee, as being distant and different from them, but will be kind of affirmed by somebody who’s perhaps had similar experiences. There’s an aesthetic distance. I mean a Congolese child may identify with some bits of “*The Other Side of Truth*,” but other bits may be completely different.”*

This concurs with Rutter’s (2006) opinion that the homogenisation of the refugee experience is to be avoided, and that it is only through looking at the specifics of different countries’ political history that we come to a better understanding of individual circumstances.

Throughout the interview, Naidoo displayed a sophistication in her responses, which showed a clear vision of who those readers might be, demonstrating a good understanding of the range of experiences that refugees from many different countries might have had, both similar and diverse. Her attitude concurs with research, already mentioned, by Melzac and Warner (1992) which asked refugee children what they appreciated in terms of school support. They reported that they liked teachers who asked them about their experiences and included refugee issues in the curriculum.

*“Very often children appreciate the fact because they’re very, very nervous, and what makes them feel ashamed is actually people saying “we can’t talk about this”. Whereas if you find a way of being open.... What you also have to show is that actually you’re on the side of the child. Get them to know that you’re on their side.”*

Rutter, when interviewed affirmed this perspective, stressing that sensitivity is key, and also a good knowledge of the children in the class and their possible backgrounds. The idea of distancing, put forward by Naidoo, was one that she echoed:

*“I think for most children they can put an aesthetic distance between themselves and the child in the story, but be affirmed by that child having to survive new in Peckham in a kind of rough tough school...., I think they won’t relive the experience. Other things will trigger and make people re-live the experience, like news items, loud bangs...”*

One question that I was particularly interested in posing to the authors was how they thought children might feel about the negative portrayal of their country in the books. As before, Hoffman had no evidence on which to base her assertions, a position that she was entirely honest about:

*“I can only guess about that. Somalia is a violent, war-torn country and ... I think it would be wrong to show it in any other way and you do see that rather peaceful picture in the first image that you get, that he has in his mind when he’s trying to paint his home, so it’s not always like that, but in a way, that’s the kind of idyll which is shattered by the experience that leads to their having to flee and that must be common to anyone who has lived in Somalia, surely?”*

Her approach was that the more story books there are about asylum seekers, the better, and Somalis in particular are very little represented in the literature, an undeniable fact which was tackled in Chapter 1. However Naidoo was at pains to stress, when she went into schools and talked about the book, that the time she was writing about was a specific point in the political development of Nigeria, not always the norm:

*“I always point out that this is Nigeria at the time when the soldiers had stolen the government, and I point out if I’m talking with children that now Nigeria has democratically elected government. I have to say that there are all kinds of problems.”*

This is an easier standpoint to take in regards to Nigeria rather than Somalia, which has had political instability and civil war for far longer. Rutter’s perspective on this issue was that children of African origin in general, be they refugees or not, are embarrassed about the portrayal of Africa by the media. Nevertheless she pointed out that Nigerian children have more positive images of their country visible in parts of the UK:

*“In this part of London there’s still quite a strong, vocal Nigerian community who are enjoying some level of success. You’ve got a successful Nigerian football team, and Nigerian players in the Premier League, so Nigeria as a country has become much more multi-dimensional... There’s the potential for dissociating from some of the negative imagery, but that isn’t the case for Somalia.”*

She stated that, in contrast, media stories about Somalia tended to focus on pirates or famine.

### **5.5.1 Non-refugee readers**

Hoffman saw the purpose of *The Colour of Home* as two fold for non-refugee readers, on one hand to give children a clear idea of why refugees had come to the host country, and this “suppose” paradigm (Harding, 1962 & 1977) is vital in order to communicate a useful understanding of the totality of the refugee experience, the “efferent reading working here:

*“There was so much ignorance about why asylum seekers were here.... ‘People have come just to make a better life’ or something. No, it’s to have a life as opposed to being murdered or tortured or raped, or whatever.”*

The other point was to give children ideas as to what they might do to help a refugee arriving in their classrooms, as a form of “praxis” or social action, and in this way the book is empowering for non-refugees:

*“Well the message really is to encourage tolerance and understanding and acceptance because.... and to be welcoming to anyone to whom we give a home in this country, because most of us, thankfully, will never know what it’s like to have gone through what these people have gone through.”*

The importance of giving children proactive ways to tackle problems has been noted in many quarters, particularly in relation to refugee issues by Day (2002) in her study of Forum Theatre techniques, mentioned in Chapter 2, and links to Freire’s (Freire & Macedo, 1987) concept of social action or “praxis”. However Hoffman had very little evidence as to the efficacy of her project.

*“I don’t know, when I was in Enfield, the children in the classroom were very welcoming of the refugee children, but I don’t know.”*

Hoffman also raised the idea of literature providing vicarious experience, which could engender empathy and understanding:

*“I think by telling the story of one child, but personalising it, it makes it easier to identify with.....To see the refugee experience from the inside, from inside somebody’s head.”*

As already stated, Harding (1962 & 1977) questions the concept of identification as a misnomer in the reading process, but the importance of personal testimony to distil experience has been continually reflected upon. When asking Hoffman about the impact of her book in terms of changing attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers, she was candid about her own lack of concrete evidence.

*“Well obviously I hope it will be extremely effective but I have no way of knowing. Maybe it will be or not. I mean, I get very nice comments about it.”*

It is not of course, part of an author’s role to survey the interpretation and use of their text, and authors are more likely to rely on random and potentially biased feedback, mainly from admirers of their work. Naidoo’s idea was that shifts in perception were not necessarily immediate, that questioning and

opening up the possibilities can take place over long spaces of time, if at all. Her approach is one of planting seeds that may or may not germinate, according to the character and life experiences of the reader.

*“I think the fact that you actually engage and things don’t necessarily come from that point in time. I think we all know that the little seeds are planted and that something might happen later on, you can only hope that that is the case. That something somebody said to you some time back, suddenly begins to make sense and then if you have opened up a kind of line of communication that’s been one of respect and not telling, saying, trying to show, because that’s what writers do, they show, not tell, really.”*

In reference to her books set in South Africa she stated:

*“I’ve had letters from young people who then went on to join the anti-apartheid movement as a result of that, because this happens.”*

Hoffman was well aware that her books could be contentious, and that they could challenge perceptions and cause controversy:

*“There are bound to be some areas in which there’s racism and negativity fostered by the families that the white children come from possibly. I mean, you have only got to read the hatred that spews out of the tabloid newspapers to know that that’s going to be a problem. These are dangerous waters, but you can’t write any book without a risk of upsetting somebody or... I think the risk is worth taking for the benefits that could accrue in this case.”*

The risk she identifies seems to be that of challenging media discourses, a reference to the multiple codes, or “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin (1934) discussed fully in Chapter 3), that may be reflected in texts of such a controversial nature.

## **5.6 Reflections**

*The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* are widely used in primary classrooms across London, popular because they tackle a controversial issue:

the treatment of asylum seekers in the UK in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but in a form which is accessible to children. Yet their role in understanding and validating the refugee experience, despite it being the stated aim for both authors, has never been researched. Although the initial motivation for the two books was different, one commissioned, the other composed, the background to the two authors is startling in its similarity, in terms of age, class, intellectualism, and family links to migration themes. However Naidoo was arguably more politically motivated than Hoffman, due to her experience of exile, and is maybe closer in consciousness to the refugee children written about. Nevertheless both books aim to reach out to children with a powerful message and strong images, and both authors demonstrate thorough research prior to writing. Evidence of how the books are used to understand and validate the refugee experience is harder to come by, although arguably not in the author's remit, but perhaps it should be part of their responsibility when approaching such controversial and sensitive themes.

## **Chapter 6 – *The Colour of Home*: Teachers as Mediators**

### **6.1 Introduction**

During my interview with Mary Hoffman she commented on the feedback she had received concerning *The Colour of Home*:

*“I’ve had very, very favourable reader response, and the number of people ...who have written to me... would indicate to me that it is finding the kind of audience I hoped it would. That is to say that it is being used in schools, that it is popular, that people are taking it seriously.”*

I would now like to examine whether Hoffman’s aims, as discussed in Chapter 5, are borne out in practice when reading *The Colour of Home* in the primary classroom. In this chapter I will be looking at the role of the teacher, as a key “enabling adult” (Chambers, 1991), in introducing a text dealing with refugee issues and will be analysing responses to my second research question:

- **How are these books mediated by teachers when sharing them with children?**

I will be examining how teachers plan for reader response and critical literacy, and how they mediate the text through reading and questioning. I will also be considering teacher perceptions of diversity in the school and class, and their ideas about children’s engagement with the dominant themes of the book.

### **6.2 Planning for reader response and critical literacy**

#### **6.2.1 Teaching “The Colour of Home” through PSHCE**

In my interview with Jill Rutter she gave the following opinion:

*“I think the discussions around the book have been far too constrained by the remnants of the literacy hour, and teachers’ creativity has been constrained and using things like ‘Circle Time’ to explore some of the issues in the book is very rarely done... and I think the teachers role is to provide the context, to provide varied activities that while developing children’s language also gets children to think about the themes in the book, and these kind of varied activities aren’t there.”*

Although not explicitly mentioned in the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999) or 2014 (DfE, 2013), the two areas where refugee issues have tended to have been addressed, both alluded to in the above quote, are through Literacy, or PSHCE, as discussed in Chapter 2. The latter was a non-statutory subject in Primary Schools, but has now become just a preamble in the new National Curriculum in England, 2014 (DfE, 2013), called only Personal and Social Education (PSE). The practice of discussing controversial issues as part of “Circle Time” used to be a valued part of the school day, but has dwindled in recent times as the curriculum becomes increasingly narrowed.

Both of the Year 1 teachers in School A and School B were reading *The Colour of Home* with their class as part of PSHCE and as such should have related the lesson to the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999). In fact April was little concerned to provide a “learning objective” at all, and did not offer me a written plan of the lesson. When asked about the objective, nothing was mentioned about the refugee experience, and she stated informally that the lesson was to do with “*learning about and empathising with others*”. A highly conscientious teacher of 40 years standing, this attitude was not due to lack of professionalism, but more a confidence in her own professional judgement. Nerys did give me a clear plan and “focus” which was written up as “*Communication: Feelings/Emotions: Understanding of other cultures.*” She had clearly based her lesson on a plan for teaching *The Colour of Home* from Pearson Education (previously mentioned), available on the internet, and this learning objective is very broad in scope, not including explicit reference to the refugee experience either. Furthermore, the “othering” (see post-colonial critique, discussed in Chapter 3) of the refugee experience enshrined in both learning objectives through the terminology

used, serves to highlight differences rather than similarities between groups (Knowles & Ridley, 2005).

Teachers also mentioned the scattered nature of PSHCE, which, unlike Literacy, tends to be composed of isolated lessons where a topic is not sustained over several weeks, thereby lacking depth and follow-up. Rutter (2005) has highlighted problems with token lessons about the refugee experience, as raising more questions than teachers can effectively deal with, and reiterated this in her interview:

*“I think a ... one off lesson on refugee and migration really does “other” refugee children.*

April also voiced regrets about the lack of time to relate her reading to the children’s own experience of starting school:

*“If I’d spent more time on it we would have maybe talked more about their feelings of coming into school. I could have milked, you know, I could have got a lot more work out of it...and in more depth talk about these things...”*

However, with the removal of PSHCE as a discrete subject area from the National Curriculum in England, 2014 (DfE, 2013), these short opportunities to engage with the refugee experience through children’s literature will disappear altogether. After September 2014, such books will only be able to be introduced to children via the Literacy curriculum, with a focus on the development of literacy skills, rather than engaging with the subject matter of the text, even more so than the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999), discussed below.

### **6.2.2 Literacy objectives and appreciation of the text**

In Year 3, where the book was studied as part of the Literacy curriculum, the learning objectives were more focussed on developing children’s skills, particularly in writing (Marshall, 2006) rather than their knowledge,

understanding, attitudes and values, as the quote from Charlie's interview below demonstrates (my underlining):

*"I suppose it's just one of those texts that, it encourages and inspires them...to improve their writing and to talk more about the text, particularly in the classes that we have, particularly at this school... and 'The Colour of Home' provides a lot of opportunity... for pair work and talking about it, and that enables them to talk through, and then it will reflect in their writing."*

As discussed in Chapter 4, I also had access to a scheme of work provided by an LA advisor who had been brought in to work with Simon, the Year 3 teacher previously, using *The Colour of Home* in the classroom. The scheme was divided into 5 parts:

1. *Introduction and Being New*
2. *Home*
3. *Moving*
4. *Objects.*
5. *Feeling settled/belonging"*

However there were no learning objectives attached to each lesson fitting Literacy curriculum criteria. The scheme focussed far more on the delivery of information – about the author, illustrator, about Somalia and the war, reasons for leaving a place, and engaged also with feelings and emotions, developing vocabulary and definitions of terms. In this way the scheme drew children's attention directly to the subject matter of the book, and functional literacy skills were dealt with as a by-product, generated by responses to the text, rather than dominating the focus. The scheme did engage with critical literacy, such as considering the "constructedness" of the text (Comber, 2001) through an initial discussion about the author and illustrator, and there was some possibility for generating "social action" (Lewison, et al., 2002) in terms of children welcoming newcomers to the class.

Charlie had based his planning on the LA advisor's scheme of work, from the previous year, but also included skills-based learning objectives for example, using prefixes, using complex sentences, focussing on spelling, handwriting,

commas to include extra clauses, and the use of apostrophes for contracted words. In practice these objectives were addressed fairly briefly, and did not detract from the content, subject matter, and “message” of *The Colour of Home*, but this raises questions about whether discrete skills-based learning, that highlights the mechanics of literacy acquisition, should be taught alongside such an emotive text, rather than deriving incidentally from it. The text level objectives for the three weeks were as follows, with very few actual references to accessing the text (my underlining):

*“Week 1: I can express my opinion clearly, listen to others, evaluate and recall facts, write in role, and adapt my writing in response to a text*

*Week 2: I can retell a story verbally, sequence events of a story, act in role, empathise with characters, create an image based on text.*

*Week 3: I can obtain specific information, use language that is appropriate to the reader, adapt my writing to suit a purpose.”*

Given that the Literacy curriculum should encompass speaking, listening, reading and writing, it is surprising how little the actual activity of reading is highlighted. However, tackling a book such as *The Colour of Home* through the Primary Literary Strategy (PLS) rather than the PSHCE guidance has the advantage that a longer time can be spent on it. Working with the text over three weeks results in more opportunity to discuss the issues arising in greater depth, which has to be preferable when dealing with such complex subject matter.

### **6.2.3 Differentiation in Year 1**

As Year 1 approached *The Colour of Home* in one or two discrete lessons, it was interesting to consider the differentiation of response planned by the two teachers. Both asked for a written response from those deemed to be of “higher ability” in Literacy and a drawn response from the rest. The work that April set the class demonstrates this clearly:

- Nine “lower ability” children were asked to *“Draw a picture of your favourite part of the story.”*
- The rest of the class were given the question: *“What do you think about this book?”*

These two tasks ask for a very different level of engagement with the text, the first heading requiring a somewhat difficult response to a potentially disturbing book, the second heading being much more complex in its demands, asking children to consider the text as “constructed” and give their opinion about it. What is noticeable here is that April does not cognitively challenge those in the “lower ability” group in the same way as she does those with “higher ability”, although they may have equal powers of criticality and reasoning (McDonald, 2004).

Excerpts from Nerys’ plan show the work set for three groups following the reading and questioning:

- *Group 1, Teacher led, (High Ability): How do you think Hassan was feeling at different points in the book? ... Why? Children to write down their thoughts/opinions of this book. What do they think the message of the book is?*
- *Group 2, Teaching Assistant led, (Average/High): Tell the children that like Hassan they are going to use pictures to tell his story... Discuss six main events in the story which they are going to put into pictures.*
- *Independent (Low Ability) and (Average/Low): Role Play: Story of Hassan, Literacy: Words to describe Hassan, Art: Paintings of own home.*

Again, Nerys asks the “higher ability” to give their thoughts/opinions on the book, and asked what they think the “message” is, whereas the middle and lower group merely retell, or respond to the images. Nerys had more support in the classroom in the form of a teaching assistant, so that two groups could have adult input to steer a discussion before asking children to record their thinking on paper. I observed in my field notes that the use of small discussion groups in Nerys’ class worked well when expecting children to offer opinions and generated better written work as a result.

### 6.2.4 Addressing the refugee experience in Year 3

In Year 3 there was much more time to develop an understanding of the nature of the refugee experience, in its different phases as depicted by Hamilton and Moore (2004) through reading *The Colour of Home*. Looking at pre-, trans- and post-migration ecologies gives a much rounder view of the differing aspects that refugees may or may not have encountered.

#### 6.2.4.1 Concepts of home and reasons for leaving

The LA scheme from the previous year, which was used for the basis of Charlie's plans, introduced the pre-migration situation by looking at Hassan's pictures of home in the book and discussing similarities and differences with children's own homes. By contrasting the words "home", "house" and "to feel at home" it asks teachers to bring out the different meanings of the words

*"(e.g. house is a building that you may live in; home is the place where you live and belong; to feel at home is not attached to a building but is about people, familiar surroundings, belonging, feeling comfortable and settled and accepted)."*

Identifying the non-physical aspects of sanctuary, for example the importance of people, attitudes and feelings is useful for the understanding of refugee issues. The scheme looked at Hassan's reasons for leaving in the general context of why people have to move.

- *"Establish that Hassan had to leave because of the war in his home, but that there are lots of reasons why people have to move.*
- *In talk partners brainstorm reasons for people moving. Collect children's suggestions onto strips of paper and display.*
- *In pairs/threes sort cards with reasons on into categories e.g. forced/chosen, happy/sad."*

This session brings to the forefront the triggers that motivate people to leave their home country, how these differ between refugees and other migrants, and the emotions generated by forced migration.

In his plans Charlie tackled Hassan's concept of home and reasons for leaving in pictorial form, and directs children to focus on feelings about this:

*“Children given copy of paragraph describing Hassan's drawing. They draw their own version and down one side write words/phrases describing image...They then alter their drawing and list new words/phrases down other side.”*

When Charlie asked the children to scribble out the picture as Hassan did, my field notes record:

*“All class draw over and smudge out original picture using black and red pencils. The room suddenly becomes really noisy! The atmosphere in the classroom is electric! All very animated.”*

In this way Charlie shapes the class's response by encouraging children to empathise with Hassan, confront the refugee experience in a kinaesthetic manner, and address the cause of flight. The chosen task sets the children's imaginations on fire and the excitement in the room at the time indicated that Charlie had skilfully mediated an emotional reaction from the children towards the text, the “aesthetic” side of reading response (Rosenblatt, 1978).

#### **6.2.4.2 Making the journey**

The LA scheme asks children to discuss which objects they would take if they had to leave their home in a hurry. 10 special objects are passed around in a suitcase and they have to choose two and explain why, along the lines of the activities Rutter saw as vital to accompany a text. In his interview, Simon, who had taught the book the year before, appreciated that good ideas, actively engaging children in empathising with the refugee experience, had been introduced by the LA advisor:

*“I think his cat was left behind so we had some discussion about “If you had to leave, what precious possessions would you take with you? What would you leave behind?” ... She had a bag, and in her bag she had a few items which meant something to her, so she would pull out an item and ask them what it was and then she'd give the story behind that artefact, so I did the same as well.”*

The fact that both teachers took part in the exercise too, demonstrated that adults as well as children may have to make difficult choices under pressure, and that this could happen to any one of us at any time. Regrettably this important session had been taken out of Charlie's scheme of work, and although it was not clear why, it may have been that as the school's Literacy co-ordinator, Charlie preferred to concentrate on the text in his teaching.

#### **6.2.4.3 Arrival in the new country**

The first session in the LA scheme focussed on the feelings of being new in a class and welcoming new children, playing on the common ground that many children may have with a refugee child arriving in this country. Charlie's plans included role play between the newcomer, a welcoming child and the teacher, which helped children enter into the lived experience of the refugee child. The final LA session focusses on feeling settled and belonging, comparing how Hassan feels at the end of the book to the beginning. The plan asks teachers to highlight signs:

*“play football, make friends, paint another picture, show his mum, look after sister, smile, notice the colours, begin to learn English.”*

In this way children can enjoy the way *The Colour of Home* reaches a resolution or “happy ending”, although we have seen in Chapter 2 that this is often very far from the truth.

#### **6.2.4.4 General observations**

The LA advisor's scheme encourages the use of factual information “about Somalia and the war..” However I would suggest that teachers need information provided to teach adequately about Somalia, a country that has a complex and turbulent history, and a map to show where it is located in the world, in relation to the UK, would also be useful. What the scheme does say is

*“stress positives and resilience e.g. bravery, new life, being at school, friendly teacher and children, learning new language and skills.”*

Viewing refugees as resilient and proactive (Rutter, 1985) (Masten, et al., 1991), rather than vulnerable victims, is useful, but if encouraging empathy is also a target, then addressing negative feelings and events must also be part of the picture. As the scheme of work came from an advisor linked to the EMAS, rather than the Literacy curriculum, the stress put on understanding refugee issues was useful and focussed.

In Charlie's class, children are asked to engage in several stimulating tasks; writing a diary entry about Hassan's first day in school, making a story board about his journey from Somalia, writing Hassan's feelings throughout the story, preparing and asking questions of "Hassan", and writing a book review. Finally my field notes record Charlie telling the class that they will

*"write their own version of 'The Colour of Home'. Their story will be about a boy who joins a new school and misses his old home. Teacher discusses that although it will be using 'The Colour of Home' as inspiration, it won't be a direct copy."*

Interestingly none of these activities differentiate between forced and voluntary migration, and a focus on the refugee experience is not demanded. Without the prerequisite that the protagonist has had to flee, children can choose a point on the migration/refugee continuum of their preference when reworking the story. It may be that teachers are reluctant to encourage violence in stories written by children, and Charlie certainly preferred to concentrate on the less complex and "softer" issues of newness, language barriers and welcoming, deliberately looking at "social action" that children could take in helping the outsider to adjust to their new situation. However, in focussing on the individual feelings of Hassan in the story, this could be seen as a safe option and less political in nature. Lack of contextual knowledge might have been a factor, but unless texts are deliberately introduced with the express intention of addressing refugee issues, they become hostage to the requirements of the Literacy objectives, as discussed earlier.

## 6.3 *Teachers mediating the text*

### 6.3.1 *Précising the script*

As I sat and watched April reading *The Colour of Home* to her class, the role of the teacher “stand(ing) in for the author by giving the text a ‘voice’ when reading to the child” (Meek, 1988, p. 10) was played out clearly in front of my eyes. I realised that the children were not accessing the actual text, but a version of it that April wanted them to receive, according to her professional vision of what would engage them most. The text was interlaced with points of information and questioning, and became remade through this “running metatextual commentary” (Luke, et al., 1983, p. 118) and yet “the text and the talk remain transparent and unread” (Baker, 1991, p. 176). Not only did April change the wording of the book, but she also dramatized it, giving voices to the characters, and stressing parts that she felt were important or frightening in the text. Barrs & Cork (2001) noted that teachers ‘perform’ the book as they read aloud, bringing the page to life. An excerpt from my field notes, taken during my visit, demonstrates this process well (T stands for Teacher):

*“The T departs from the script and explains everything clearly. She relates rather than reads it. “That’s what Somalia looks like” says the T...*

*All are horrified with the change of picture (when Hassan paints over it). No one could explain why he might do this. T gathers speed, having got their attention.*

*She makes Hassan’s voice very frightened, dramatising the script...”*

April draws the children’s attention to the pictures and comments on them, providing her own interpretation. Luke and Luke (1989, p. 252) note: “tacitly and intentionally, teachers will emphasize and de-emphasize, select and exclude,” and through this process a subject position is covertly constructed (Baker, 1991). In her interview April felt that she could have précised the book more and explained her motivations for doing so:

*“I think it’s quite wordy for my age children, the Year One’s actually, and if I had have had time I would have cut it down a lot.”*

Nerys also justified what she saw as the need to précis *The Colour of Home*, for reasons of time and maintaining the children’s concentration:

*“I think the text is accessible and again the illustrations do help the children to understand. I feel the story itself can be a little bit long... but you can shorten that... and make that easier for the children.....You might be able to use it in a different way, perhaps just looking at the pictures and talking around the pictures rather than going through the whole story.”*

She saw no problem with using the book as a stimulus, rather than a need to engage with the language written by the author and pertaining to the text. The “Death of the Author” (Barthes, 1968, first published in English 1977) has occurred indeed! In such a way the teacher could subvert the “transactional” nature of the reading experience as envisaged by Rosenblatt (1978) and create her own circuit, over which she would have far more control.

Although in Year 3, the reading of the text was interspersed with some questioning, the teachers, Charlie and Sam (a substitute teacher), read directly from the book, so that children did actually access the original text, which was divided up into sections for reading and responding over the three weeks of study. Where the mediating role of the teacher was felt more, was during the discussion that followed each section of the text.

### **6.3.2 Questioning and discussion**

Following the professional practice which April has developed over many years, she questioned the children while the book was being shared, showing how teachers shape meaning during the reading process. My field notes recorded the proceedings, which I have interspersed with commentary:

*T says “it starts in a school, just like this one.”* (Teacher relates to the children’s own experience.)

*T asks "Who is Mrs King?" "The teacher" they respond. T says "She wants to make him feel at home, welcome." (Teacher asks closed question and provides points of information.)*

*T asks "Why do we learn indoors?" One boy says "so that we can be safe". T explains: "We have to stay inside because it is cold and wet in this country." (An open question which the Teacher answers herself.)*

*T points out his face. "He looks a bit sad. There are some happy things and sad things in this book." "What was he speaking Amal?" "Somali" (Points of information and summary of contents, and targeted closed questioning of Somali child.)*

*"How do you think he's feeling under the bed?" "Scared." (An open question encouraging empathy.) "Who's this soldier?" (A very open question – too difficult to answer) Somali girl points at gun. One girl notices the cat. Somali girl says "That's my country".*

*"What's happened to the uncle?" "He's dead." "Soldiers killed him." "They're in danger." (An open question leading to a variety of answers.)*

Through her "Booktalk" (Chambers, 1995) April builds up the situation, focussing the children's attention on the story and asking them to offer their interpretations. However at one stage she asks a question fitting an answer that she has in mind, and supplies her own ideas. Generally, though, she demonstrates clearly the teacher's role as envisioned by Iser (1976, first published in English in 1978) "to facilitate intersubjective discussion of individual interpretations" (ibid, x), drawing out the multiple potential meanings that children have found in the text, but control of the discourse remaining firmly in her hands.

During Nerys' reading of the book, she pauses over the pages where Hassan and his family are driven from their home by violent events, to direct children's attention to this (Ch stands for child).

*T: "What's happening?" Ch: "He's hiding" T: "Why?" Ch: "Soldiers are there" (Open interpretive questions.)*

*T: "Do you think they might kill him?" (Asks the children's opinion.)*

*T: "What's happening in this country?" (Open question.) Children suggest "War." T: "Yes."*

In this extract Nerys does not hold back from addressing the violence in the text, but also asks open ended questions, eliciting their opinion, along with the "suppose" paradigm (Harding, 1962 & 1977). She appreciates children's contributions, but by giving firm approval to one children's answer, she suggests that there is a "right answer", subtly moulding the class to move towards one accepted meaning in "assent to canonical interpretations" (Skidmore, et al., 2003, p. 2). As Fisher (2008) comments in many literary encounters: "Achieving the teacher's interpretation of the text remains the goal for children." (ibid, p. 26)

After the reading was finished, Nerys' questioning continues, aiming to encourage the children into a whole class discussion of the book. The Pearson website, previously referred to, suggests the following when planning for an appreciation of *The Colour of Home*:

*"Discuss with children what it means and feels like to be homesick. Ask them to share stories of their own experiences with homesickness. Ask children what they know or have heard about wars past and present."*

Linking texts to children's own experience is seen as good practice in literacy teaching by Comber (2001) and Hall (2003). However below we can see that Nerys is working with ideas from the Pearson plan, demonstrating that in practice interpretations may come from a third level of mediated meaning, which is not immediately obvious.

*T: "Why is he sad?" Ch: "Because he doesn't know English." Ch: "He misses his cat." Other children offer ideas: "New school" "New country" T: "Homesick is when you miss something." (Teacher directly introduces vocabulary from Pearson.)*

Similarly encouraging teachers to address the topic of war directly is helpful, both past and present, and may embolden reticent practitioners to engage in discussion they may have thought of as too controversial for Year 1. We have

already seen the concept of war raised, and here Nerys tackles it in further depth, in line with the Pearson plan:

*T: "Why did he have to leave?" Ch: "Because there was a war." T: "What's that?" Children offer ideas: "When they have a battle." "Fight another country." "A big massive fight." "When Germans try to kill each other." T says: "That was a long time ago."*

Again Nerys takes a variety of suggestions and encourages the children to contribute their ideas, but also moderates the discussion when it treads on delicate ground about Germans! Finally we reach a big question which is not detailed anywhere in the plan, but is central to critical engagement with a text:

*T: "The Message? What does this book tell us about? Any ideas?"*

*T: "How we can communicate with other people." (Teacher supplies an answer in the gap that follows, using one of the key words from her learning objective)*

*Ch: "He misses his country" (possibly more accurate than the above!)*

The class "discussion" is therefore less free than the word suggests, in that children are being steered to respond to questions in order to fit the objectives of the plan, rather than engage in a free-ranging conversation about this book, which might follow their own thoughts, feelings and engagement, and relate to their own life experiences. Furthermore there is no mention of the refugee experience, which I would suggest is an opportunity missed, both to extend conceptual knowledge and vocabulary.

In Year 3, when a substitute teacher, Sam, comes to teach the lesson, the following extracts from my field notes demonstrate further how the teacher mediates the text. Sam starts by talking about Hassan's painting which he says he found quite disturbing, giving his own reaction from the outset, and thus showing the children what kind of response he expects from them. Here we see them complying with that view:

*Ch: "He put a man with a gun and bullet coming out shooting his uncle."*

*T: "What did he do to one person?"*

*Ch: "He smudged out his uncle."*

*T: "What really happened?"*

*Ch: "The uncle died."*

*T: "Did he die a natural death?"*

*Ch: "No. He was killed."*

*T: "Do you think Hassan saw this?"*

*Ch: "Yes."*

*T: "Do you think it's a good thing for a child to see?"*

Here we see that Sam elicits the response he wants by asking closed questions. He builds up a picture that he has in his mind, and transfers it to the minds of the children, not through telling but by questioning. Interestingly, he erroneously leads the children to believe that Hassan witnessed the killing of his uncle, which in fact the text makes clear he does not, and asks them to make a judgement about it. This is reminiscent of Fish's (1980) famous title "Is there a text in this class?"

Finally in Year 3, having read the book slowly over five lessons, and engaged in various activities to respond to the characters and plot, the children are asked to sum up their thoughts about the text in its entirety. The beginning of this session was based on Chambers "Tell Me" (1993) approach of identifying likes, dislikes, puzzles and patterns in a book, (see Chapter 3) that has been adopted by the "Power of Reading", run by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE), and doubtless taken on board by Charlie through the school's participation in the project. Interestingly, this was the only time that Year 3 engaged in a discussion about war and its effects, when they were at last allowed to make their own links and ask questions of the teacher, instead of the other way round, as is usual. This reveals another source of inspiration in the planning cycle and also suggests that good literacy pedagogies can lead children to be critical and exploratory.

Critical literacy is not just a deconstruction and response exercise, but is about developing awareness of the book as an artefact and giving children a real voice in discussing the text (McDonald, 2004). Teachers who take an authoritarian stance guide children to pre-existent interpretations (Smith, et al., 2004), but using proper “dialogic” enquiry, as described by Alexander (2005), practitioners encourage children to engage in speculative meaning making. However the questions introduced by Charlie here do not go far enough to truly embrace critical literacy tenets as readers need to the opportunity to “make personal judgements... about the extent to which the text has achieved its purpose” (Fisher, 2008, p. 26) and view the text as a crafted object that has ways of representing reality that could be otherwise.

### **6.3.3 Teachers’ contextual knowledge**

In Year 3 the amount of subject matter given to the children about Somalia is minimal and sometimes has a negative spin on it. Early on Charlie asks the one Somali boy in the class directly: “*Where is Somalia?*” to which Kadiye answers “*South Africa*”. Charlie makes no move to correct this but says he will get the map out later, although this was not carried through and so an opportunity for building up locational knowledge is sadly lacking. Furthermore, when a discussion takes place about the difference between schools in UK and Somalia and why lessons were taught outside, children respond that it is hot there, a conclusion that is carried, rather than questioned. Charlie comments to the class that they are lucky to live in England, where it is not too hot, in contrast to April, who suggested that the UK was wet and cold. Other images of life in Somalia are portrayed in a negative way – that Hassan didn’t know how to paint, not that he had enjoyed playing outside, and that there were nine people in the house, playing up the overcrowding angle rather than the pleasure of living in an extended kinship group.

In a later discussion Charlie returns to the differences in schooling between the UK and Somalia:

*T: “Do they have different lessons?”*

*T asks how many of them have been to school in a different country. Many put their hands up. What did they do? ...*

*T suggests that there would be similar lessons, eg. Maths, literacy...*

*T: "What about lunch times?"*

*One boy explains about Halal. T. draws out 3 children who eat Halal, but doesn't give this as a possibility for Hassan...*

*T: "Why didn't he eat the food?"*

*Ch: "Because it would be different food."*

*T: "Children don't try things".*

Here we can see how Charlie seeks to relate Hassan's situation to the children's own experience. However there are many opportunities missed in this short exchange for greater understanding of life in Somalia, e.g. the teaching of Arabic in schools, and the eating of Halal meat for religious reasons. The power of the teacher as "enabling adult" (Chambers, 1991) to develop a "community" of readers (ibid) according to his vision does not leave space for other interpretations within the class to be utilised.

#### **6.3.4 Relating to children's lived experience**

April and Nerys both tried hard in their meta-textual commentary to relate the story to children's own experience of having new children arriving in their class, possibly without sufficient English skills to communicate fully. Simon also described in his interview how his class had made the connection between the book and the lived experience of a boy in their class:

*"At the time there was a boy who'd come from Slovakia, so... and he had no English and he'd just arrived in the class... I mean, he wasn't a refugee. He wasn't an asylum seeker. He just came for an economic...reason, and he took a long time to settle in really, and he took a long time to pick up English words, so at the time there was that sort of thing about "Oh, Stefan can't say this", and "Oh look, Stefan said this", and so children were feeding back to me about things he's started to say."*

Charlie also endeavoured to relate the initial part of *The Colour of Home* to the children's lived experience, asking "Hands up who was born in another country?" However, rather than developing contextual knowledge, the "efferent" side of reading response (Rosenblatt, 1978), Charlie uses his questioning to encourage empathy from the children towards Hassan:

*T: "Imagine you are Hassan standing at the doorway. How will you feel?"...*

*T: "What is he thinking about?"*

*Ch: "Thinking about what his house used to be like. He misses his family."...*

*T: "Why is he feeling lonely?"*

*Kadiye: "Suddenly realising how far away he is from his family." ...*

*T: "How is he feeling now?"*

*Ch: "unhappy" "memories of the war."*

Here Charlie displays a consistently open style of questioning, asking children to put themselves in Hassan's place and imagine his thoughts and feelings. Interestingly one of the respondents here is Kadiye, the only Somali child in the class and usually very quiet. Although never having been to Somalia, he could have been motivated by the refugee legacy to some deeper understanding of the issues of family separation than other children had and possibly this was a transformative moment.

### **6.3.5 Teachers' own experiences**

Where Charlie's class also benefit, is that the session about Hassan's journey to safety is taught by Sam, a substitute teacher, already mentioned. Sam relates Hassan's experience to his own of arriving in the UK as a South African Asian, without friends, family or accommodation, and his feelings of loneliness and fear at that time. This lesson demonstrated what a key figure the teacher is in filtering the text, and my field notes record:

*“T. has been talking to the class about his experience of arriving in England for the first time. He is talking to the children and explaining that both he and Hassan come from Africa. T. draws a quick map to show Somalia and South Africa, where the T comes from.”*

Personal testimony has been mentioned earlier as a particularly beneficial way to teach about refugee issues, and although Sam’s story is not one of a refugee it contains enough similarities, to bring the situation alive to the children in the class, demonstrating how migration/forced migration is in fact a continuum (Rutter, 2006). However he was careful to point out the differences as well – that he already spoke English, and that he had chosen to come, but still felt very lonely and fearful on arrival, reflecting Baker’s “Relationship Web” (1983), discussed in Chapter 2.

*T: “Do you think they were absolutely happy now, or do you think they still longed for home? When I came, I wanted to go home every day.”*

Furthermore he gave the children the locational background to the book that had been missing before and related it to his own country of origin via a hand drawn map. That Sam was so open as a teacher about his status as a migrant to the UK, and ready to share his own feelings of insecurity with the class, meant that he added a highly positive value to Hassan’s position as a refugee coming to Britain, but also deepened the possibility for empathy. Thus both “efferent” and “aesthetic” aspects (Rosenblatt, 1978) were enhanced by Sam’s input.

At one point, Sam became so involved with the lesson and remembering his own experiences, that he continued reading from the book, but forgot to show the pictures in the powerpoint that was displayed on the white board for all the children to see clearly. Thus he omitted to show them the illustrations of what had happened to Hassan, when soldiers burst into his house, he hid under the bed, and then the family had to flee to safety. Again we see that each individual reading is a separate “transaction” in the words of Rosenblatt (1978). Here the teacher leaves out a very important visual part of the text, so that children do not get to access the graphic pictures which give vital clues as

to the events as they took shape, such as that the family fled on foot initially, a point that is not made in the text.

## **6.4 Teachers' perceptions**

### **6.4.1 The impact of school ethos**

As our school populations grow in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, as well as reflecting a myriad of different student experiences, such as the seeking of asylum, there have been calls to work on "pursuing a whole-school approach toward building a culturally responsive ethos in which all students are valued" (Johnson, 2003, p. 17). Three of the teachers who participated in the study, April, Nerys and Simon, commented that the ethos of their schools was vital in setting the tone for children's attitudes to newcomers in general and refugees specifically, and this was reflected in children's responses to the *The Colour of Home*, as they were familiar with the issues. As April put it,

*"We encourage our children to welcome new children, so I think it's very good for that, because we get children all the time who just come in, who are new."*

April felt that there were no negative attitudes towards refugees.

*"No, not in a school like ours with such a mix. I don't... We don't have that kind of racist or... attitudes really in the school, so I don't think so, no."*

She went on to qualify this statement by acknowledging that if there were, she didn't hear them, whether they existed or not.

*"There might be parents mumbling in the playground... "taking our jobs and our houses". I don't know. But I haven't picked it up from the children."*

Nerys also observed that she had never heard any negative comments about refugees and asylum seekers in school.

*“You might get it in Key Stage 2, but certainly not... I didn’t ever hear it with the young children. Not at all. I don’t know if their understanding is deep enough to really be able to make those, those comments.”*

Simon corroborated these opinions, in stating that the welcoming ethos of School A was a very important feature generally throughout the institution, an observation that my own visits to the school endorsed and that anti-refugee feeling was not noticeable on any level.

*“ It doesn’t show itself in the school... Whether it shows itself in the community is another matter, but I don’t think it does. I think this is such a varied community, like it’s a varied school. Whenever there’s been any, nothing to do with refugees, whenever there’s any racism in this school obviously it’s clamped upon as outrageous and the child is often sent home... It’s extremely rare because of the mixture of children, for one thing and because...the ethos that’s been built up over the years, without doubt.”*

Knowles and Ridley (2005) make the point that this whole school antiracist ethos needs to be embedded in regular classroom work, not just a tokenistic celebrating of diverse cultures, while ignoring ‘hard’ issues of attitudes to asylum seekers and racism, and is a process that is never complete. Charlie, unlike the others, mentioned that when he had taught *The Colour of Home* the previous year

*“some of them used insults kind of loosely based around ... I think it was FOB or ‘F’ ‘O’ ‘B’ for Fresh Off the Boat, or something ...and they’d heard that saying from some of the Year 6 kids and they kind of used it for when you’re not quite together, and you haven’t quite, you know, got a lot of money, or you don’t know what you’re doing, ‘oh look at you, you’re fresh...”*

This was the first time that possible anti-migrant feeling, counter to the welcoming school ethos, was acknowledged as part of the pupils’ repertoire.

Charlie's observations revealed that there were indeed anti-migrant images at play, but that they tended to have lost their precise meaning and be applied more randomly as a term of insult. Generally however, this indicates that teachers may have a rose-tinted view of the school community, and be unwilling to acknowledge the darker elements of prejudice that may exist, viewing young children as "innocent" whereas they may be conscious of attitudes in wider society. Parsons (2009) maintains that teachers tend to view attitudes in the school neighbourhood and community as not something they need to tackle, and Vincent (1992) notes that this stance is futile. "When mainstream multicultural education focuses on the school as the main site of understanding and intervention, it effectively divorces the importance of wider social, economic and political agendas from the possible discourses available to students and teachers" (ibid, p. 303.)

#### **6.4.2 Using and understanding the term "refugee"**

My field notes detail that when April embarked on her reading of *The Colour of Home* she introduced the protagonist, Hassan, and the location of the book as Somalia. After that I have recorded that she employs the term "refugee" directly:

*"T tells the class that Hassan is a refugee. Does anyone know what that means? Two put their hands up..."*

*"They have to come to their country and have to go to a different country if something happens." (This appears to be a very good definition from a six or seven year old.)*

*"People are friendly and say come to our country and are friendly.""*

In this way she immediately brings the refugee experience to the fore and children's answers display a rudimentary understanding of the issues at stake. In the following extracts from her interview, April sets out her ideas of what the children in her Year 1 class might understand of refugee issues after reading the book in class:

*“To be honest, I don’t know how much they grasp about what a refugee is when they are that little... They understand that some people need caring for more, or some people are sad or... but the concept of being a refugee and homeless, I don’t think we’ve gone into it in great detail... I don’t think they’ve got a definition of a refugee...But it’s a good start for them... It’s a beginning understanding ...”*

She felt that this understanding was aided to a great extent by the pictures in the book, but at this age the concept of forced migration was beyond them, underestimating their comprehension, it seemed to me. In terms of the wider message of *The Colour of Home*, April felt that her children grasped the more superficial elements of welcoming newcomers to the classroom:

*“they could relate to that problem of being new in a school. ... it probably makes them more aware of how other children feel, and of course every year they’re new to a class, so I think that helps too.”*

Possibly prompted by the Pearson plan, as we have seen earlier, Nerys is much more direct than the other teachers about confronting the issue of war, although in her interview she states that this has arisen before, when children talk about personal migrations of those in the class.

*“At the beginning of the year when we look at the cultural heritage of the class, we do talk around why people move from other countries and sometimes they will say “fighting”, so they are aware of things like that... I don’t know how much they would relate that to actually being a refugee and their understanding of that word.”*

Although she did not use the word “refugee” during either teaching session that I observed, she felt they understood the position of new arrivals in the classroom, or had maybe experienced this themselves, as the school had a highly mobile population, but felt the specific nature of the refugee situation was something that did not need to be spelled out.

Simon felt *The Colour of Home* had managed to change perceptions, but mainly about what it is like to have a language barrier and about welcoming new arrivals. He observed that the word “refugee” was only used when it

came to Hassan's journey, and suggested that the children were possibly too young to embrace the concept.

*“ We did use the word refugee and Janet used it because of the fact they had to... flee during the hours of darkness, and why they had to go... The time it came up was obviously when he had the story of why he had to leave, so then it did definitely come up. The soldiers... the picture of the boots and him climbing under the bed.”*

What is interesting here is that it was the LA advisor who used the word “refugee” and again we can see that teachers may be reticent to tackle such topics directly, needing an external impetus to encourage them to do so, as with the discussion on the nature of war in Year 1, drawn from the Pearson plan. It would seem that teachers are willing to engage with such topics when prompted, but almost need external permission to do so.

In Year 3, Charlie felt that children could respond to the idea of being new which the book raises as this is a fairly universal experience:

*“Where it's a new child coming to school, they can all relate to that quite well, so even just from that level, before you get to the whole issues of refugees and things like that in the story, the whole new experience and... starting a new school...so immediately they've got something they can pin to.”*

When asked whether he thought his Year 3 class were aware of the word ‘refugee’, Charlie was equivocal:

*“No, I'm not 100% sure, to be honest. It did come up in one of our discussions and yet again it was only really one or two of the higher literacy and more able children that would put their hand up... and they would have an idea...”*

### **6.4.3 Violent themes**

Wollman-Bonilla (1998) noted that teachers frequently rejected texts because they might frighten or corrupt children, implying that school should be kept separate from society. In contrast, April was not put off by the seemingly heavy subject matter of the book. Disclosing what she describes as a

“personal problem” about guns, she didn’t really think this was a problem for the children:

*“I am prepared to show children things like that...because it’s in context and it’s not celebrating guns or doing anything like that... so it’s clear that it’s the bad people have the guns, so I don’t think it’s a problem at all really ...and they can cope with those things.”*

Interestingly, in a review of Deborah Ellis’ (2005) *Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak*, in the Toronto Star, a 10 year old girl, Evie, defended the use of violence in Ellis’ books, asserting: “If children are tough enough to be bombed and starved, they’re tough enough to read about it” (fishpond.co.uk, n.d.). When asked about the violent image of the soldiers coming in while Hassan hides under the bed, Nerys felt that:

*“Most of the kids see so many things like that anyway. It might have been that many, many years ago we might have thought that was too shocking for them to see... I actually don’t think it really shocks them now. No, actually that’s maybe not quite right... perhaps some of the children were disturbed by it, but I think then, what you have to do maybe is just talk about it a bit more, about what that image was.”*

Simon suggested that despite the violence of the subject matter, the book demonstrates the resilience of children who have experience of these kinds, as long as they have the right support.

*“They see films with guns and people being forced to move and all this sort of stuff, so the subject matter was something they could understand, and ... that the boy was able to paint pictures of how he felt and he had someone to talk to as well, didn’t he?”*

In Key Stage 1 generally, teachers tended to engage with the theme of newness and welcoming rather than the “heavier” themes leading to an understanding of the refugee experience. If the more difficult areas were focussed on, they were explained through the concept of war, and in fact *The Colour of Home* itself does not use the word “refugee” at any point. However, the following chapter will demonstrate that when children in Year 1 were asked to précis the story, many referred to war, bullets and guns. Furthermore

several of the books made by children in Year 3 depicted situations where the protagonist was fleeing from a violent situation, although this was not given as a necessary part of their narrative. Perhaps teachers' views are at odds with what children are capable of assimilating and understanding, or perhaps they preferred to focus on possibilities of "social action", thereby building on children's capacity for agency in the process.

#### **6.4.4 Awareness of refugee children in the class**

Using the method described in Chapter 4 for estimating how many children are possibly from a refugee background, and referring to school statistics (see Appendix 4), it can be seen that there may be eight or nine children, out of 29 or 30 in each class observed, whose family circumstances should be taken into consideration when reading a text such as *The Colour of Home* in the classroom. During her interview April commented that:

*"no one was directly refugee in that class...so they couldn't relate to the fleeing aspect."*

This was probably true, and April's knowledge of the class was such that she was sure no particular child had fled to escape persecution, it being clear that the two Somali children were born in the UK. In fact right from the beginning one of these children identified herself, as my field notes show:

*"T introduces Hassan and Somalia. Anyone know anything about it? There are 2 children in the class from Somalia. One says "that's my country". T asks "can you speak the language?" The girl replies "I say to my aunt that I want to go and visit"."*

Nerys also began her reading of the text by highlighting Somalia, but in contrast to April, she named the two Somali children in the class. When asked if she had any refugees in the class, Nerys included these children, as we had just been talking about them in depth. In Year 3, Mashad had come from Afghanistan four years ago, but Charlie had not connected him to the refugee experience, despite having the data available. The following comments from Charlie's interview throw further light on the matter.

*“When you start in a new class, ... Your file of children’s data ... you’ll have main language or whatever, and there’ll be a large chunk of children that’ll have a separate language as their main language but their country of origin won’t necessarily mean they were born in that country...It’s not something you bring up in parent/teacher conversation...there’s nothing else in any of our data files.”*

This demonstrates the need for better training of teachers about the manner in which children from a refugee background can be identified, and the possible special awareness that is needed when working in a cosmopolitan context. I would suggest that this is an important area to be covered both on ITE courses, and again when teachers have their own class, via INSET, and CPD.

Furthermore Charlie felt that children might not perceive themselves as refugees, as they would not be aware of the definition, which concurs with observations from refugee commentators, that refugees do not tend to use the term themselves (Rutter, 2006).

*Charlie: “And we have children in the class whose parents come from other countries or them themselves might be from other countries, but I don’t know if they would see themselves, you know, how they... would they necessarily perceive...”*

*JH: “...themselves as refugees? Yes.”*

*Charlie: “...as refugees? You know, and I think that’s quite a tricky one...”*

Charlie’s interview flagged up to me the hidden area “refugeeness”, unknown, unrecognised, and unmentionable. Even his hesitation at using the word shows a reluctance to engage with the term, and possibly the stigma associated with it.

#### **6.4.5 Considering the perspective of refugee children**

When tackling refugee issues through literature in the classroom, it is pertinent to consider whether such texts can be potentially disturbing for refugee

children who have had a similar experience. Charlie makes the point that this is entirely possible:

*“I think there’s a potential, perhaps, if it mirrored ... if there’s quite a close similarity between the reasons why they left, how apparent it was to them when they left, which we don’t necessarily know.”*

Nerys’ stated that she would still read the book if a child was uncomfortable with subject matter but,

*“I think maybe then have some kind of discussion with the child, or within a small group, because they may not like to discuss it...Perhaps if somebody had just come from another country where ... something might have just happened to them, then that might be too distressing in a whole class situation ... So it might be at a later point, it might be in a smaller group, it might even be on a one-to-one or a partner basis.”*

This suggestion is often given, but in practice it is very difficult to organise such provision. Usually teachers have to rely on their professionalism to consider the potential effect of a text used in the classroom, but knowledge of individual children and their backgrounds is crucial if practitioners are entrusted with such delicate decisions.

## **6.5 Reflections**

*“In any classroom, the teacher is the interpretative authority on the text for the students. The narrative is filtered throughout the teacher’s talk about the text, that is, the teacher mediates the text to the students.”*  
(McDonald, 2004, Pg. 18)

Responding to a book as complex as *The Colour of Home* is not achieved easily, and tackling such a controversial area in only one or two lessons is not conducive to productive reading and response. Furthermore Literacy objectives sometimes detract from real understanding and interpretation of the subject matter of the text. As demonstrated in the above chapter, teachers play a key role in filtering the text, through reading, questioning and discussion with children, overlaying the story with their own preconceptions, personal life

histories, knowledge of key concepts, and socio-political perspectives. “How discussions are structured reflects the beliefs and practices of the classroom teacher” (Galda, et al., 2001). In terms of planning for engagement, McDonald (2004) points out that reader response, bringing children’s life experiences to the text, remains the dominant way of working for most teachers, whereas critical reading practices ask that the text is brought for judgement. The first position demands some departure from the reading, the second needs even more time to teach effectively. Finally, teachers’ awareness of the backgrounds of children in their class is part of their professional responsibility, especially relevant when reading sensitive texts about the refugee experience in the classroom. How far teachers’ mediation affected children’s responses to *The Colour of Home* in Year 1 and Year 3 is to be explored in the next chapter.

## Chapter 7 – *The Colour of Home*: Children Making Meaning

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter will address my third research question:

- **How do refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to these texts?**

*“To be critically literate, children have to be helped to question how they make sense of the world and interpret it, and to draw on their own experiences”* (Fisher, 2008, p. 26).

This chapter builds on the work of Cochran-Smith (1984) and Keene and Zimmerman (1997), discussed in Chapter 3, by analyzing how children make different kinds of connections, namely: “text-to-self”, “text-to-text”, and “text to world”. In this chapter however only the first and third categories are used, as at no time were children asked to make links between *The Colour of Home* and other texts. Furthermore, “text-to-world” connections were highly generalist in nature, and something that was noted as lacking in the previous chapter. Meek asserts that “if we want to see what lessons have been learned from the texts children read, we have to look for them in what they write” (Meek, 1988, p. 38). I will therefore begin with some general analysis of the work generated by Year 1, in terms of writing and also drawing, which is an important avenue of response particularly for younger children, and discuss how far this demonstrates that they had reached a rudimentary understanding of the refugee experience. However, sometimes children offer up contributions in talk time that they would not be able, or would not think appropriate, to write down. Thus I move on to analyse class and small group discussion, as well as individual interviews, in Year 1 and Year 3, to throw up more complex themes than drawing or writing might provide.

## **7.2 Evaluating response in Year 1**

Madura (1998) categorised children's responses to visual texts as *descriptive*, involving retelling and plot summaries, *interpretive*, making comments about the story, text-to-life and personal experiences, and *thematic*, showing an appreciation of the themes, styles, and techniques displayed by the authors and artists. As we shall see in the following section, children's responses analysed in Year 1 mainly addressed the first two levels of this simple model, although there was an extent to which they engaged with overall themes raised by the book, but not in any discussion of style or technique.

### **7.2.1 Building a "community" of readers**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, written and drawn response to the text in April's Year 1 class was set at two levels, according to ability. In response to "Draw a picture of your favourite part of the story", all children had drawn vivid images, some had included developmental writing, which the teacher had transcribed into recognisable words, and for others, the teacher had scribed an accompanying sentence from the child. The sentences were as follows:

*"The cat is going to walk."*

*"He made his picture messy. His cat had to go somewhere."*

*"He done a nice one (painting) and he done a rude one."*

*"Hassan is painting the gun and his uncle."*

*"The soldiers came to the house."*

*"His grandpa is dead. He was going to hide away."*

*"Hassan was playing football."*

Some clearly engaged with the story in a superficial way, but some talked about the violence in the story, responding to dramatic elements, suggesting that they had addressed significant moments and themes, rather than their "favourite part". Between them, they had also referred to all three parts of the refugee continuum, pre-, trans- and post-migration (Hamilton & Moore, 2004),

such as the separation from pets, the possibly violent causes of flight, and experiences in the new country.

April gave the rest of class the question: “What do you think about this book?” This links with critical literacy, where children are asked their opinion of a book, and comment on it as a “construction.” However, this group also preferred to engage in descriptive retelling of a significant aspect of the story, suggesting that critical literacy is a practice that needs to be fostered over time. For example:

*“he DiD lick The School he DiD Fil lick home We hav a new boy Joining us at Shcool today HassA Didt wont to son his pichc to his mum and sister.”*

*(He did like the school. He did feel like home. We have a new boy joining us at school today. Hassan didn't want to show his picture to his mum and sister.)*

Again this provided an overview of the story, including the key components of school, home, new boy, picture, and family although no element of migration or flight had been included. Children's writing across April's class focussed most frequently on the picture and Hassan's mum, but also having to leave the cat behind, and violent aspects of the story, although more positive than negative emotions were referred to. The new school and the welcoming teacher featured highly, and the name of Hassan's country of origin was remembered, maybe because of the presence of two Somali children in the class, one who was very vocal in declaring “that's my country.”

Nerys also set tasks for her children in Year 1 by ability grouping. The “higher ability” group discussed the book with the teacher and then were asked to write their opinions of the book as well as explaining what they thought the “message” might be, again attempting critical literacy. However despite constant encouragement, children seemed challenged by the concept and again response was merely a retelling of the story. The painting was again high profile, but many more children in Nerys' group identified the sad feelings associated with this, seeming to link with one of the learning objectives,

“Feelings/ Emotions,” already discussed, and demonstrating a degree of interpretation. In contrast to April’s class, all Nerys’ “higher ability” group refer to bullets, guns and war in their writing, reflecting her focus on the theme of war explicitly, as suggested in the Pearson plan. Some children wrote about Hassan having to leave Somalia, fewer about leaving his cat. Finally, an important element for this group was Hassan’s encounters with language barriers in his new school. Given that one of Nerys’ learning objectives for the session was “Communication”, this clearly struck a chord with the children’s “text-to-life” and personal interpretations. Children had also responded to all aspects of the refugee experience, reasons for leaving, taking flight, and adjusting to the new situation.

These comparisons between the two Year 1 classes, point clearly to the role of the teacher in directing children’s attention to aspects of the story that they have planned to highlight. As Arizpe and Styles (2003) assert, with reference to children interpreting visual texts “teachers *do* make a difference” (their emphasis) (ibid, p.245). Nerys’ focus on war is shown up strongly in the children’s writing, while April makes less of this in her reading, acknowledging her own “personal problem” with guns. What is also striking is that, given their young age, children across both classes and all ability groups have responded to the refugee experience, despite the word never being used by any of them, and only briefly by one of the teachers in reading the book. The skill of these two teachers is demonstrated, via the children’s work, in that they have been able to build a “community” of readers (Chambers, 1991), with all responses showing that meaning has been made from the text at some level. However children found it hard to move away from the story to the “significance” (Hollindale, 1988), and from purely personal responses to wider socio-political undercurrents as Stephens (1992) advocates, albeit addressed at a simple level.

### **7.2.2 The interaction of words and pictures**

We now move on to look at some written and drawn responses to the book, which illustrate the use of pictures, their relationship with words, and children’s

ability to respond to the refugee experience through these media. While Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) assert that written language has been the dominant system of meaning used in educational contexts, visual image has often been seen as merely supporting the text, rather than being a system of meaning in its own right. Early on Moebius (1986) identified certain graphic “codes” that operate within the elements of design and expression in picture book. These include: position on the page; perspective; framing; use of lines; use of colour. Similarly Kress & van Leeuwen’s (1996) seminal work on “reading images” has been refined by Serafini (2009) to a focus on narrative processes; visual symbolism; composition; and perspective. However Sipe (1998) suggests that teachers often feel they lack the training in visual literacy to analyse and understand children’s images, and to help their pupils construct meaning for themselves through pictures.

In interpreting children’s drawings in response to picture books, Rabey’s (2003) work suggests that they can be analysed in terms of *literal responses*, “whereby the child draws people or events from the text to communicate story and content” (ibid, p.118), *overall effect*, “considering qualities such as the aesthetics of the image and a discussion of colour, tone, form and line” (ibid) and *internal structure*, “examining the composition for balance and the relationship between objects or characters and their relative scale” (ibid) and asserts that “a visual experience demands a visual response true to its original form” (ibid). The following analysis of the interaction of words and pictures in Year 1, demonstrates some interesting aspects of children’s engagement with challenging subject matter in picture book form, referring to the above model.



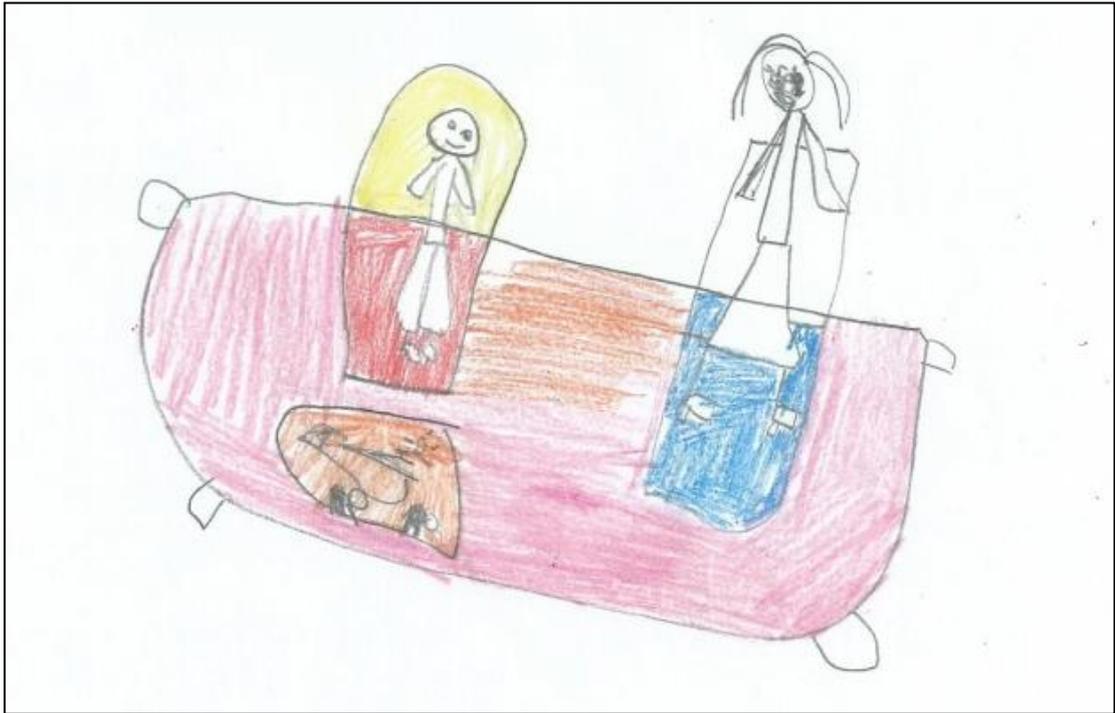
**Figure 11: "The soldiers came to the house."**

In Figure 11, the picture does not seem to depict the same scene as the caption suggests, as the people drawn look like family members rather than soldiers. It is also not clear whether the figures are standing outside the house or running away, either being a possibility. This is a contradiction which was repeated continually, as we shall see below. Another point emerging from several of the pictures, as with the one above, is that many of the houses drawn by the children are not of a rural Somali dwelling as in the book, but of a stereotypical British house. More exposure to images of Somalia showing different sorts of indigenous housing might have yielded other results, and again highlights the importance of providing children with background context. However the use of colour relates well to one of the dominant themes of *The Colour of Home*, and thus reflects a consideration of the overall effect of the picture in response to the book.



**Figure 12: "The soldiers killed the granddad."**

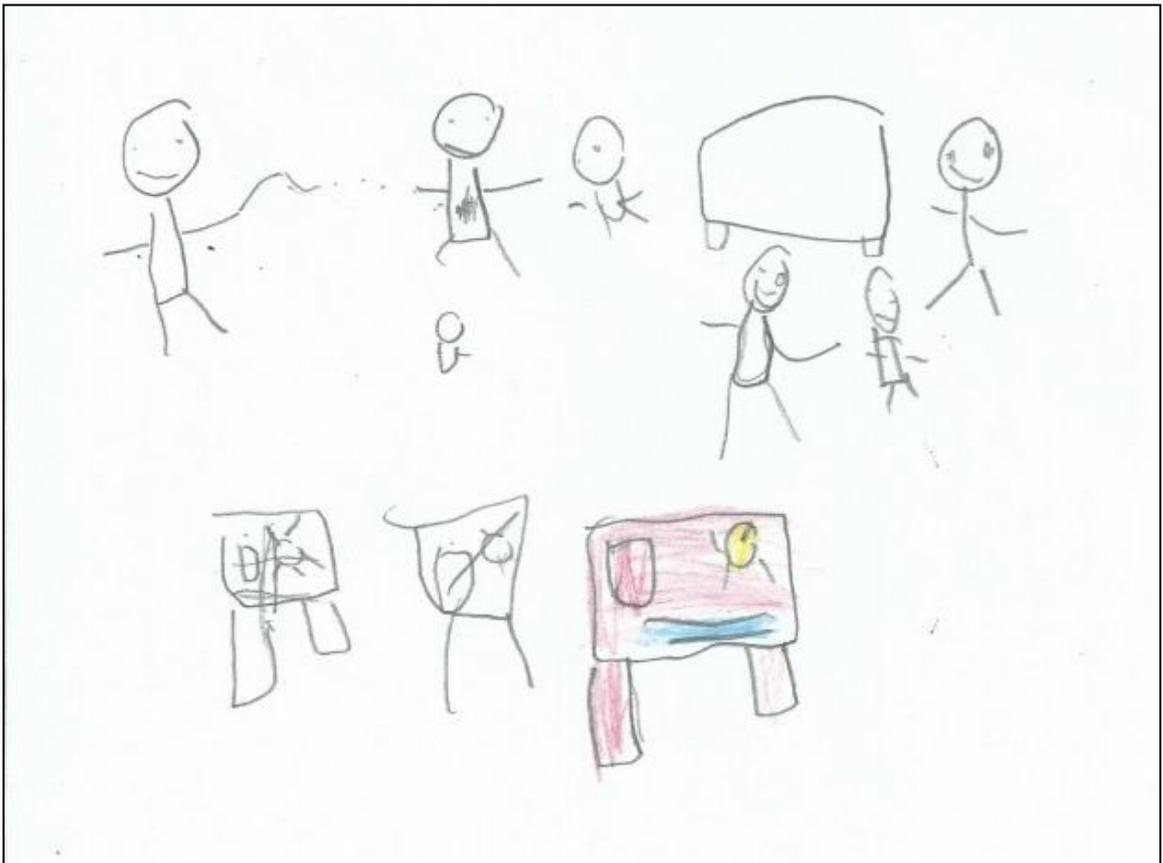
In Figure 12 we have a very good example of attention to internal structure, as the piece contains a "picture within a picture", the actual scene to the left, and Hassan's depiction of his house and cat to the right, complete with blazing sun. Here, again, the writing that goes with the picture, "the soisu kidoll the grudad" ("the soldiers killed the granddad"), does not fit with this idyllic scene at all. Similarly, in Figure 13, there is a contrast between the artistry of the image and the ability of the child to sum up the moment in words. The picture is a colour evocation of Hassan explaining about the events behind his picture to the interpreter. This is a key moment in the story, and if the word "so" is substituted for "Bcos", which may indeed have been the intended meaning, the sentence makes perfect sense, with the teacher as an important figure, for whom the second picture is painted. The image pays careful attention to colour, form, line, balance and scale, with the interesting detail of the characters legs seen as if through the table. Such a depiction shows intimate engagement with the subject matter, beyond the developmental stage of the child's written skills.



*(Miss Kate was sad because [so?] he made a new picture was smaller that was nice and clean and not red.)*

**Figure 13: "Miss Kate was sad Bcos he Made a new Picher was smler that was nise and clen and not red."**

Figure 14 is a highly intricate depiction of the whole story in a series of finely drawn images, demonstrating again an engagement both with overall effect in terms of colour, form and line, and internal structure, through balance and relationships. Above, a stick person fires a gun at another, who is clearly wounded, if not killed, and subsequently the family leave their house. Below, Hassan's school picture is shown on an easel, in three stages: painted, painted over, and repainted, this time in colour, with a yellow sun shining brightly in the corner. This child, although again unable to respond to the book adequately in writing, has assimilated all the aspects of the story and is able to reproduce it in pictorial form. In the process they have demonstrated complete understanding of the narrative, the conventions of visual representation, and have embraced all aspects of the refugee experience as outlined in Hamilton and Moore's (2004) 3 stages.



**Figure 14: "I O uncle The new picture."**

In contrast, Figure 15 shows a good example of the “higher ability” group’s writing, being asked to explain the “message” or meaning of the book. It refers to the main elements of the refugee experience: war, flight, leaving pets behind, and language barriers. However, while the child has clearly understood the story, and has written a lucid account of events, there is no attempt to engage with the wider significance or “meaning” of the book, beyond one individual’s story of forced migration and adaptation, despite the best efforts of Nerys to encourage this aspect of critical literacy. Nevertheless, as with Figure 14, we are beginning to see a conceptualisation of the refugee experience in its entirety.

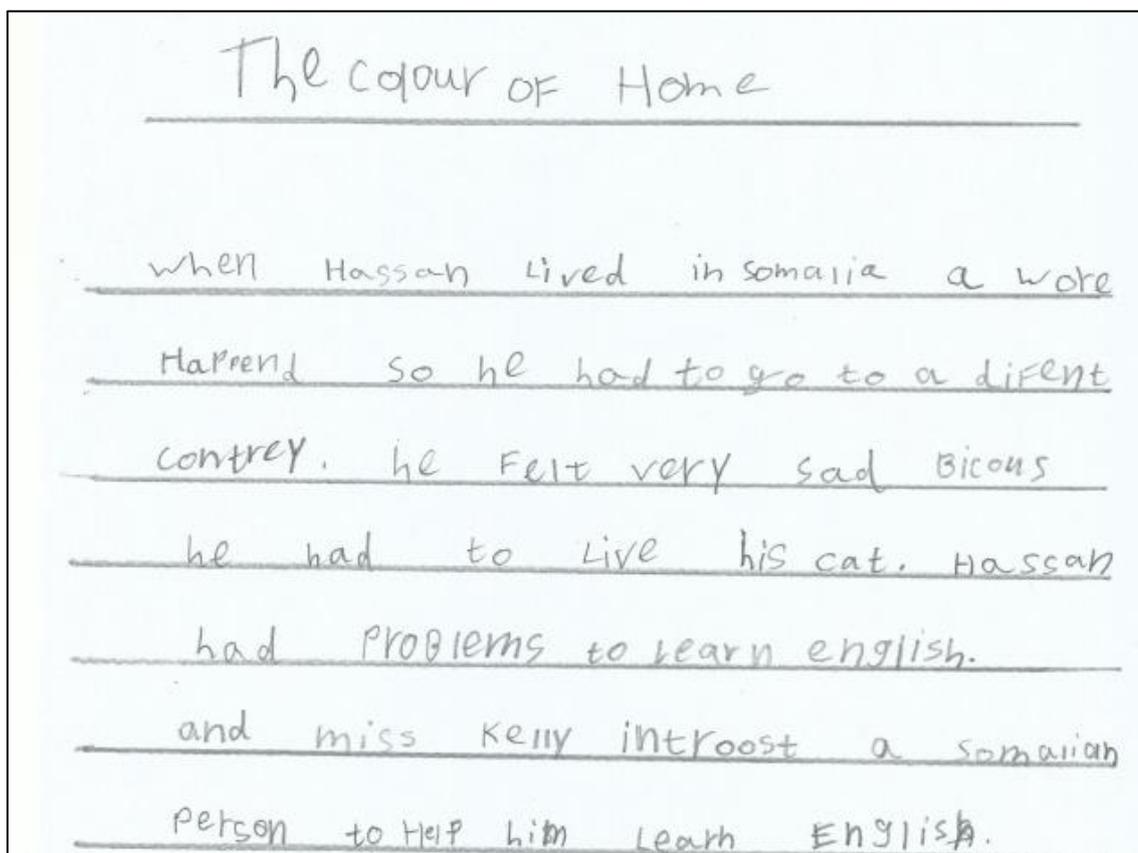


Figure 15: Précis of "The Colour of Home".

*"When Hassan lived in Somalia a war happened so he had to go to a different country. He felt very sad because he had to leave his cat. Hassan had problems to learn English and Miss Kelly introduced a Somali person to help him learn English."*

Lewis (1996) has pointed out that picture books carry "two different forms of signification: the verbal or textual and the pictorial or iconic. Meaning is always generated in at least two different ways" (ibid, p. 271). This is also the case where children's responses contain both writing and drawing in conjunction. However Nodelman (2005) suggests that illustrations play a powerful role in conveying to children the overall story and "meaning" far more directly than the words do, and in fact can carry more allusions and connections than may be in the text itself. Furthermore, as Arizpe (2009) points out, for new arrivals with little knowledge of a host country's language and culture "the visual image becomes a powerful source of information" (ibid, p. 134).

All the above is reflected by the contrast in many cases between the clarity of the picture and the confusion of the words produced by the children in Year 1, and endorses the need to provide opportunities to respond in a variety of ways that best suit their preferred mode of expression (Arizpe & Styles, 2003). The conflict between visual and verbal response shown in this data is intriguing, and although reasons can only be a matter for conjecture, it is possible that Sipe's (2008) idea of "personal resistance" (ibid, p. 166) is in play here, with children either finding the subject matter too disturbing to depict in images, while they were able to engage with it in words. Whatever the case, we can see from a variety of reader responses - verbally with transcription, drawn, and/or written, that the overall theme of the refugee experience has been depicted by children in different ways, and demonstrates dramatic expression the more it is examined. Children have clearly understood the story in great detail, shown in their pictures, and the care they have taken and vividness of their drawings in terms of colour, form and line demonstrate a dynamic relationship with the text.

Thus we can see here that the images created by Karin Littlewood have made a strong impact on the children's "reading" and interpretation of the book. However Littlewood's position as an "outsider" to the world she is depicting pictorially is a contentious one (as with Hoffman's role of authoring the experiences of "the other", discussed in Chapter 5). Because authors and illustrators play a part in children's developing knowledge and attitudes, Noll (2003) maintains that it is critical that they be responsible to their young audiences for portraying cultures accurately and authentically. She argues that, though challenging, being an outsider to a culture does not necessarily preclude one from authentically depicting that culture, but writing and illustrating a book that is culturally authentic is difficult, perhaps impossible, when the author or illustrator has no experience with the culture. The extent to which Littlewood has a working knowledge of Somalia, its housing, people and culture, has not been investigated in this study, but would have shed more interesting insights, had it been done.

## 7.3 Text to world

### 7.3.1 Understanding the refugee experience in Year 3

Three samples of Izzy's work in Year 3 show an in-depth understanding of the refugee experience which one girl has built up over the three weeks spent studying *The Colour of Home*.

Write notes to describe the journey of a Hassan. *Kern*

1. The soldiers came Hassan was terrified he didn't know what to do. ✓

2. He hid under the bed he was speechless and the worst of all he was cramped. ✓

3. He ran away with his family he was very sad that he left his cat behind. ✓

4. He left his cat behind he was very frightened he didn't know anything.

5. He queued for food he was famished but he was relieved that he had food. ✓

6. In the end when he went to England he was finally safe and over the moon. ✓

I can recall events from a story.

You used some very good words and phrases baby. You missed out on some parts of the journey though.

Figure 16: Izzy's description of Hassan's journey.

Figure 16 shows how under the learning objective "I can recall events from a story" Izzy has written:

1. The soldiers came Hassan was terrified he didn't know what to do.
2. He hid under the bed he was speechless and the worst of all he was cramped.
3. He ran away with his family he was very sad that he left his cat behind.
4. He left his cat behind he was very frightened he didn't know anything.
5. He queued for food he was famished but he was relieved that he had food.
6. In the end when he went to England he was finally safe and over the moon."

Here Izzy has skilfully reduced Hassan’s story into six main points. In doing so, she has mainly focussed on the first and second stage of the refugee experience (pre- and trans- migration, as detailed by Hamilton and Moore (2004), although briefly demonstrating an understanding of the final post-migration stage as well. She mentions the cat twice and clearly relates to Hassan’s fear and deprivation, using highly evocative words such as “terrified”, “speechless”, “cramped”, “frightened”, and “famished” that suggest a deep level of empathy, ending on a positive note with “over the moon”.



**Figure 17: Izzy's diagram showing Hassan's outer life and inner feelings.**

Figure 17 shows how in response to the learning objective “I can understand how events have affected a character,” Izzy produces a highly evocative diagram depicting the events of Hassan’s life (and demonstrating all three parts of the refugee experience, but particularly focusing of the post-migration ecology this time). These surround a silhouette shape of his head and shoulders with corresponding feelings inside: “sad, guilty, depressed, frightened, awful, horrified, confused, startled, heartbroken, petrified, heart

wrenched, tearful, shocked, nervous.” Such emotive vocabulary shows great compassion for the situation Hassan finds himself in.

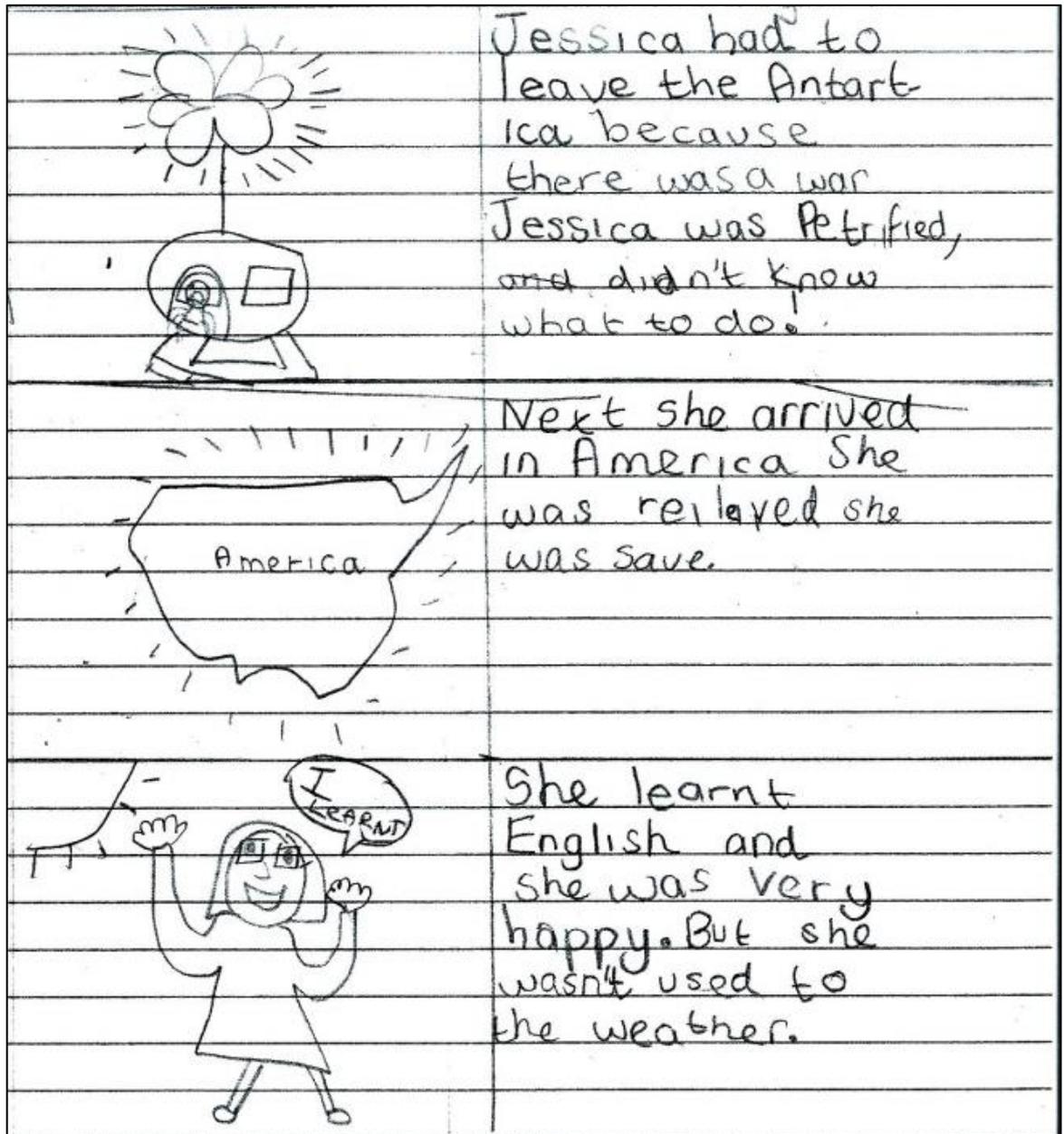


Figure 18: Izzy's story board beginning.

*“Jessica had to leave the Antarctica because there was a war. Jessica was petrified, and didn't know what to do! Next she arrived in America. She was relieved she was safe. She learnt English and she was very happy. But she wasn't used to the weather.”*

Figure 18 shows Izzy's first three pictures in her storyboard, which contributed to the making of her own book. Izzy's ethnicity and country of origin was Black American, and so she clearly had some past and direct experience of migration. She decided to start her book with a war, an escape to safety, via a well-drawn helicopter, and adaptation to new circumstances. The rest of the story (not shown here) talks of her character making friends, but missing home, despite living in a lovely house "in fact a Mansion!" Behrman (2006) notes that producing counter-texts from different viewpoints was an important part of critical literacy, as it "can serve to validate the thoughts, observations, and feelings of students" (ibid, p. 494). He feels that this especially offered students from underrepresented groups occasions to speak from the point of view of those voices that are often silenced or marginalized, thereby empowering them. The fact that Izzy's character still misses home, shows sensitivity to the attendant problems of settling in a new country as part of the migration/refugee continuum. Furthermore, all three pieces of work show a deep and perceptive engagement with the refugee situation from a child who has not directly experienced it herself, but has enough text-to-world knowledge, imagination, and some personal perspectives to demonstrate an impressive response.

### **7.3.2 Reaction to violence**

Two telling examples from Year 1 show strong and pragmatic responses to violence in the text. On reaching the part where Hassan's uncle is shot during Nerys' reading of the book to her class, one child says out loud "I would kill him." Initially I leapt to the conclusion that the child was glorifying in the violence, but after questioning the child, Nerys discovered that he felt so strongly he had wanted to avenge the killing! Sipe (2008) calls this kind of total engagement a "transparent response" (ibid, pg. 169) which he likens to Rosenblatt's (1978) "lived-through" aesthetic experience of the story, the child's world and the world of the story momentarily blended together. Meek (1987) builds on this paradox: "Listening to a story and, later, reading one, involves both taking the story world as 'real' and knowing that it is not real. We encourage children to enter the world of the story ('getting into it') and yet

we understand that they need to know that the story world exists only in the story” (ibid, p. 110). Thus she elucidates the reader response/critical literacy conflict perfectly.

In Year 1, I engaged in a small group discussion with two children, Daniel, who has Chinese and Vietnamese roots, and Maria, from Colombia, who may have heard of or experienced violent events there (guerrilla conflict impacting on civilians). I found, despite their young age the children were pragmatic when relating to the violence in the book, imagining what they would do in that situation:

*Daniel: “If it happened for real life, I would go under... actually I would go under my bed for real...”*

*Maria: “Or maybe hide in my cupboard.”*

Comparing the drawn and written work of two girls in Year 3 is also useful in interrogating approaches to violence in the text. Peliona speaks Albanian/Shqip and her country of origin is named as Kosovo. She cannot relate directly to the refugee experience, the Kosovan crisis happening before she was born, but is almost definitely from a refugee background, demonstrating deep empathy with Hassan, and a heightened sensitivity to the effects of violence. In Figure 19 we see a very expressive picture, with detail of family members, animals and the house, then scrubbed out, surrounded by emotive words to describe Hassan’s feelings “before” and “after” painting the picture and daubing over it. Amalia, partly from a Portuguese-speaking African background (maybe having indirect experience of war in Angola or Mozambique) has drawn a very detailed picture of Hassan’s home situation, including many family members and animals around (see Figure 20). Bullets are shown travelling towards the uncle, who is rubbed out, and the words surrounding the picture are also expressive.

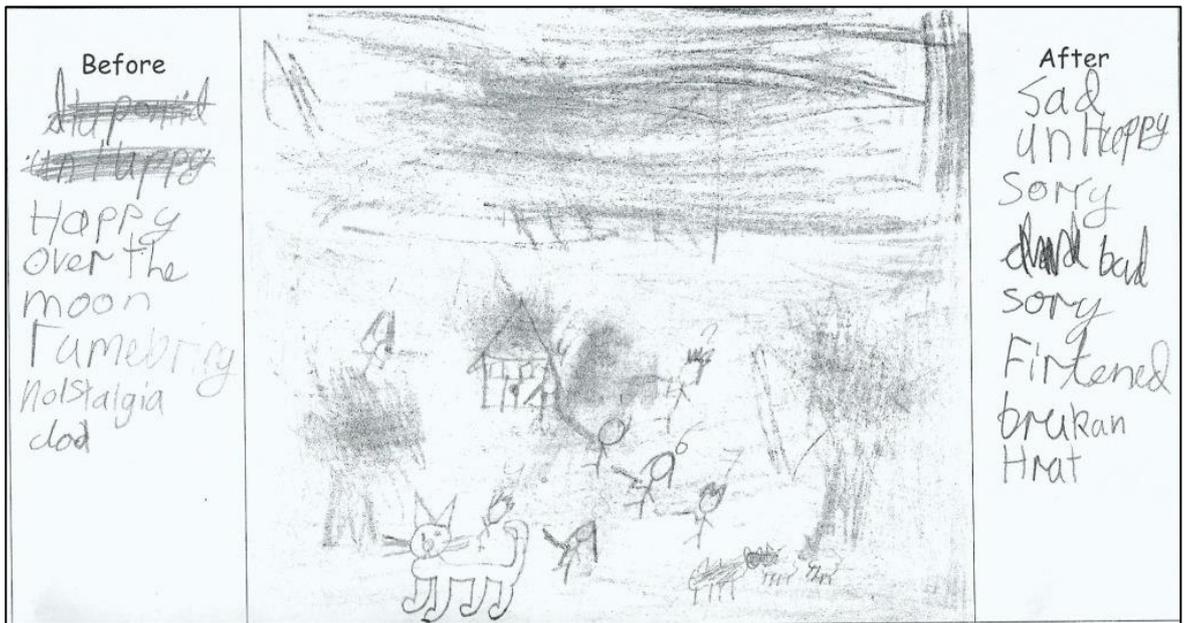


Figure 19: Peliona's "Before and After" piece.

Before: "happy, over the moon, remembering (remembering?) nostalgia."  
 After: "sad, unhappy, sorry, bad, frightened, broken."

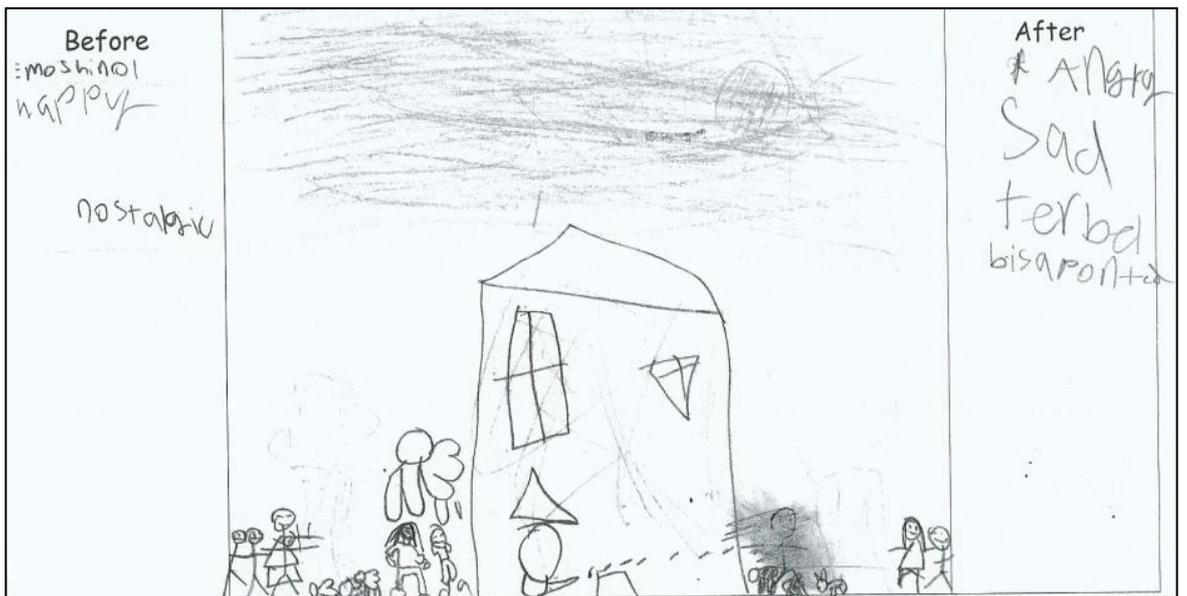


Figure 20: Amalia's "Before and After" piece.

Before: "emotional, happy, nostalgic."  
 After: "angry, sad, terrible and disappointed."

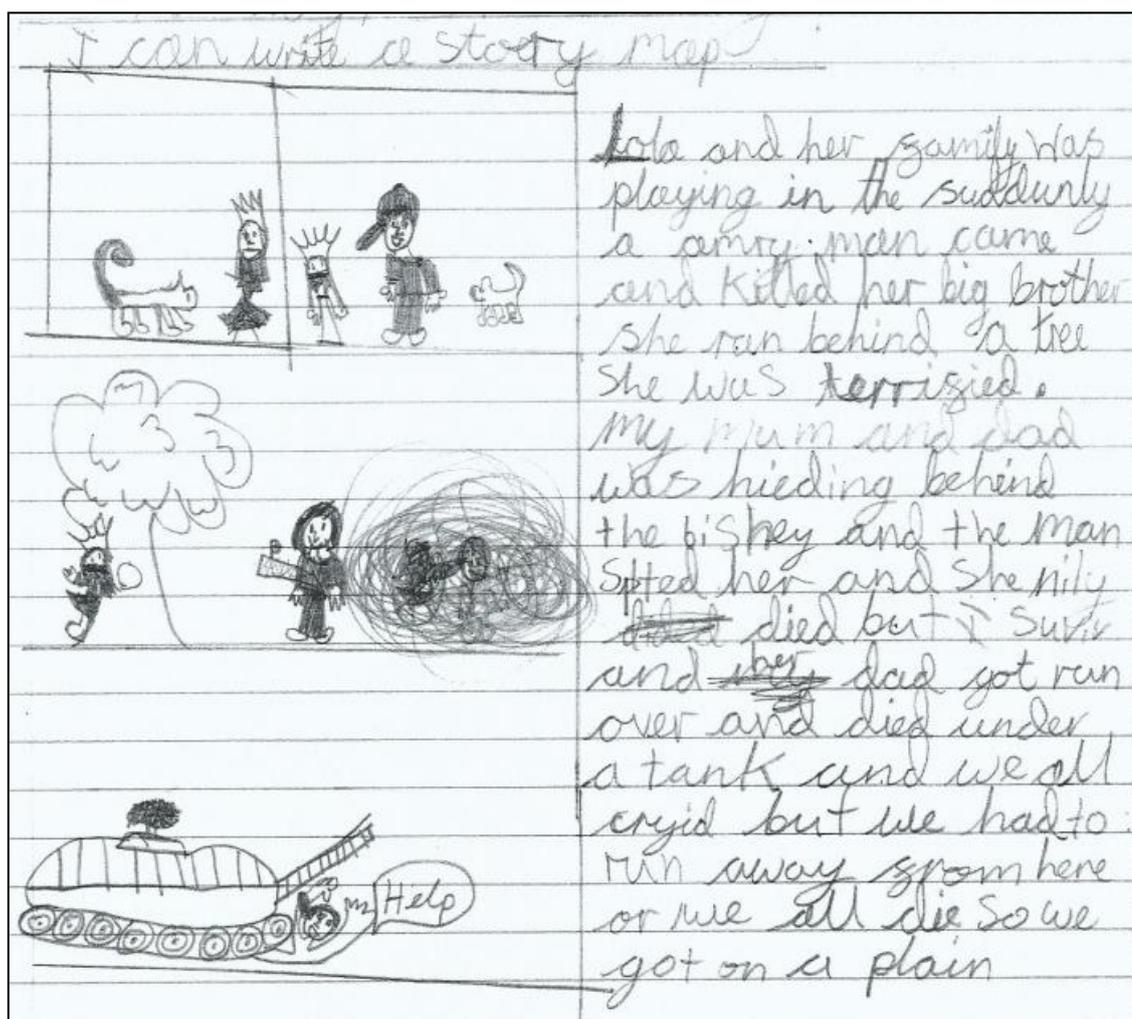


Figure 21: Peliona's story map.

*"Lola and her family was playing in the suddenly an army man came and killed her big brother. She ran behind a tree. She was terrified.*

*My mum and dad was hiding behind the bushes and the man spotted her and she nearly died but I survived and her dad got run over and died under a tank and we all cried but we had to run away from here or we all die so we got on a plane."*

When asked to construct a story map for her book, Peliona's writing is descriptive, and her pictures are graphic (Figure 21). The vividness with which she describes the scene suggests familiarity with the subject matter and her change from third person to first person narrating is indicative of her complete involvement. Although not stated in this story board, elsewhere she identifies that the girl who she has written about comes from Albania. The final image of a person crushed under a tank is chilling in its detail and adds further evidence that she finds resonance with the violence in Hassan's story.



Figure 22: Amalia's story map

Stefeny and her family live happily together in Spain. Their house burnt down. Stefeny was scared. She hid in a BOX! They had to move to LA. Stefeny was the saddest girl in the world. She went on a plane and she cried not tears of joy but sadness ones. She got to LA and she did not feel at home at her new home."

Amalia's final story (Figure 22) depicts a character who has to move because her house has been burnt down. That the family had to flee the country, suggests that they were subject to war or persecution. The story continues in an extremely sad vein, with the subject unable to find happiness in her new home. The graphic depictions by these two girls, probably both from a refugee background, in reflection of *The Colour of Home* and through their choice of violent catalysts in their own books show a grim, and possibly familiar, engagement with the theme of war and flight.

However in reaction to violence, there was a marked gender divide, with one boy commenting: "I like the war part." While girls had a much more compassionate and humane approach to the problems of war, boys appeared to relish the elements of violence in the story, appearing to confirm the findings of the "Children's Reading Choices Project" (Coles & Hall, 2002), that reading patterns and practices are highly gendered, even from a very young age (Pidgeon, 1993) . In a group discussion, boys were excited by talk of guns, and mimed shooting around the table, while girls said they found smudging out the picture frightening. Sarland (1991) documented how, in encountering the same text, boys read for "action" and girls to uncover relationships, feelings and past histories. However in Year 3 both groups seemed aware of their opposing reactions.

*"Critical ways of reading are intended to construct readers who ... recognise their position as compliant or resistant readers" (McDonald, 2004, p. 18).*

This "resistant" reading by the boys in the group, and their "acting out" of war, is also described by Sipe (2008) as "performative response" (ibid, pg. 173) to the text, whereby children playfully manipulate it for their own creative purposes. Similarly Pearson (2010) noticed that "acting out" by children in response to a text, by using mimicry and other voices, rather than being a disruptive activity, was part of their engagement with literature. Zimet (1976) also notes: "The intent of an author either to persuade, to inform or to entertain may produce a response in the reader that had not been anticipated" (ibid, p. 16), and this may come as a surprise to teachers also.

Mashad, from Afghanistan, had been in the UK for 4 years, and is therefore likely to be a refugee. Despite his limited level of English acquisition, he showed a good understanding of the story and a close identification with Hassan. In class discussion, Mashad mentioned that he didn't like the "war part", but in a small group with me, when asked which part he liked best, he remarked surprisingly:

*"Yeah, and I like the story (very animated) because when they smudge the picture and ruined it...and the bullets (said with gusto!) came and guns came... Because I like guns and I like blood..."*

When operating in front of two girls in a small group his "macho" display was similar to the two boys in the other discussion group, echoing Coles and Hall's (2002) assertion that reading choices are particularly prey to gendered peer pressure. Thus the context in which responses to text are gleaned is pivotal, and can alter the child from a compliant to a resistant reader.

Ahmed, an Arabic speaker from Egypt, also presents himself as resistant to the intended reaction of the author. Coming to the UK just before the beginning of the anti-government protests, which signalled the beginning of the "Arab Spring" in that country, meant that, although probably not a refugee, he was living in exile, unable to return to his country of origin. He was well aware of the civil war in his country and had some very strong reactions, possibly due to close connections with people still in Egypt at the time of the study. He was enthusiastic about *The Colour of Home*, and seemed interested and motivated by the book, but in the group discussion his reaction was particularly extreme:

*"My favourite part is when he smudged out his uncle... I love the horrible bits! Because I'm a boy! Cool Stuff are horrible stuff for boys. I don't like the calm stuff in stories... I like the killing ..."*

Shanaye (a girl) attempted to justify the violent aspects by commenting:

*"It's about what happened before when he's in Somalia... why he had to move to England."*

However after the discussion had ended Shanaye said to me quietly:

*“Boys think war is good but it’s not, because people get killed and they get evacuated to other countries.”*

Debora is French-speaking, from Ivory Coast, a country with a turbulent history of civil war in recent times. She revealed that she had experienced significant family dislocation and loss, which still had echoes of sadness for her, and was adamant that the book was not to her taste because of its violent content.

*JH: “You don’t like it? Ah...now that’s interesting. Why not?”*

*Debora: “Because it has blood in it and they’re talking about war. Who wants to listen to war?...”*

This striking gender divide seemed to be at its height in Year 3, not noticeable in Year 1, or in Year 5, but it is interesting to note that the findings concur with that of Naidoo (1992) when researching attitudes to racism in literature. Her work showed that, even at Secondary school, the girls in her study had displayed more empathy and were less prejudiced than the boys.

### **7.3.3 Empathising with “newness”**

The discussion group in Nerys’ Year 1 class, were talking about Hassan’s arrival in his new class. As David is of Caribbean origin, Elbasana from Albania, Anca from Romania, and Habib from Pakistan, there is clear empathy with “newness”, either first hand or by association.

*David: “He’s in the new school, but he talks a different language, cause he can’t understand because other people will talk a different language and he talks Somali.”*

*JH: “Yes...How does that feel?”*

*Elbasana: “I know! Sad, sad.”*

*Anca: “At the end though, happy... I think at the end he might be happy because one (sic) was telling the teacher what he was saying.”*

*JH: "Can you imagine going to a country where you didn't speak the language? Going to a new school there? What do you think that would feel like?"*

*Habib: "I would be worried."*

*JH: "How do you think it would feel coming to a new country?"*

*Elbasana: "Scary and sad."*

*Anca: "I would try to make friends."*

Here the children display direct understanding of the problems facing Hassan; the language barrier and loneliness. However they also tackle issues of resilience (Rutter, 1985) (Masten, et al., 1991), with the potential for him to feel better, after finding someone with whom to communicate, and the need to make friends, which links with Baker's (1983) "Relationship Web", which we have discussed earlier.

When imagining Hassan's feelings on standing in the doorway of his new class, Year 3 write:

*"Scared because they might bully me."*

*"I think they are saying horrible things."*

The vocabulary they use in their books later echoes this understanding: "apprehensive," "frustrating," "nostalgia." They comment that he could be: "feeling lonely," and "feeling angry." Also in Year 3, John had only just moved from another school in the area and I asked him how he felt when he arrived. "Scared," he replied, and remembered missing everyone from his old school, and not knowing anyone in his new class. His writing reflects these memories through Hassan's feelings of missing his family and cat.

*"I wish I could just hug them once more or two."*

When Amalia writes in role, imagining herself in the position of Hassan on his first day in school, she puts:

*“I fealt like I was a panyata and candy was going to pore out of me. Because it was like I was going to explode of shynes.”*

Amalia, being partly of Portuguese-speaking African heritage, may have had experience of piñatas filled with candy and is using this wonderful simile to relate to Hassan’s feelings. Clearly children in both Year 1 and Year 3 can feel empathy with a refugee child when depicted in a story, and can relate this to their own life experiences.

### **7.3.4 Strategies for welcoming**

One of the dimensions favoured in critical literacy is a “social action” approach (Thibault, 2004) where students make decisions on important social issues. Nerys’ Year 1 class were very good at identifying strategies to welcome new arrivals, in response to *The Colour of Home*, arguably because the teacher encouraged this dialogue. Their responses show this:

*“Try to speak his language.”*

*“Make him feel happy.”*

*“Teach him their language.”*

*“We help them make friends.”*

Again the importance of rebuilding a ‘relationship web’ for refugee children (Baker, 1983) has resonances here. Daniel and Maria both speak English better than their mother tongue, but have a clear idea of bilingualism in operation and Maria suggested the use of a same-language buddy to help in English acquisition:

*Maria: “I had a person that was my friend, Stephen, I helped him cause he speaked Spanish.”*

*JH: “Ah! So they chose you specially to help because you spoke Spanish.”*

*Maria: “Yes. I was helping him.”*

The buddying idea was mentioned in Year 3 by Kadiye, who felt that it was important to teach a new child English and show them around.

In her own version of the start of the book, Izzy wrote this highly descriptive, empathetic piece, with excellent use of vocabulary:

*“We have a new boy joining us at school today,” said Mrs Eljona. “he is called Victor and he is from North Irealnd. (sic) I want you to make him feel at home.” Standing next to Mrs Eljona, while his legs shaking, nervously and his hair frizzing up, stood a tall wimpy boy, his bright green eye’s shimmering to the class. “can I have three caring people to volintere (sic)to make Victor observe around the school?” Mrs Eljona asked. Victor stared up at him, I’m so spooked out, he thought why are they observing me? (While they’re mouth’s (sic) agape.) I wish I could understand.”*

This piece of work demonstrates graphically how children display sometimes stunning achievements in evocative and emotive writing, while conveying practical strategies for welcoming a new child in the class at the same time. Peliona’s diary entry writing in role as Hassan after his first day at school, also demonstrates how the teacher’s role is crucial in communicating with new arrivals, here by the use of hand signals. She also describes how children observe their peers and copy their behavior, in order to accomplish the tasks expected.

*“Then Miss Kelly gave me a paint prush and a pot I din’t undersan in the frist time but then she did aksons with her hand. For a sconkened I saw the kids what thay paint then I painted house a cat and 9 plople and a gote a bunch of sheeps.”*

*(“Then Miss Kelly gave me a paint brush and a pot. I didn’t understand the first time but then she did actions with her hand. For a second I saw the kids, what they painted. Then I painted house, a cat, and nine people and a goat, a bunch of sheep.”)*

## 7.4 Text to self

### 7.4.1 Talking about own lives

As already mentioned, three children in Nerys' first Year 1 discussion group have countries of origin listed as Romania, Pakistan and Albania, while David is listed as Black Caribbean in ethnicity. They are happy to discuss their countries of origin at length and are very open and positive about these places, highlighting various customs and traditions. They visit regularly and would generally prefer to live there. David is unusual in the group as he "has been to no countries." In the second discussion group, Daniel and Maria were both born in UK, but still have strong links with their country of heritage and have visited several times. I ask them if they had to leave suddenly, what they would miss most.

*JH: "How would you feel if you went home tonight and they said "We're leaving. We're going to Colombia"? How would you feel?"*

*Maria: "Bit sad... Because I would miss everything."*

*JH: "What would you miss particularly?"*

*Maria: "Friends and family."*

*JH: "Right. And would you miss any things at all? You said you'd miss friends. What about things?"*

*Maria: "I would miss my toys."*

*Daniel: "I would miss my toys, if I just left all my toys, and I would just stay without."*

*Maria: "I always bring some toys."*

*JH: "Do you?"*

*Daniel: "When I went to a different country, I just bring my favourite toy."*

Relating to her own movement back and forth from her country of origin, Maria initially says she would miss friends, family and toys the most, but as the

conversation continued beyond this extract, it became clear that her friends are particularly important to her. Further on both children make the important point that toys and friends can be acquired elsewhere, whereas family members can't. Their answers are clearly based on experiences of moving from one country to another for holidays or family reunions.

Discussing the book in a small group context led Mashad to divulge details of his life in Afghanistan prior to arrival in the UK, displaying a positive view of his previous world and a desire by his family to return there.

*JH: "So do you think your parents would like to go back to Afghanistan and live?"*

*Mashad: "We're going!"*

*JH: "Are you? Really? You're going to move, but not back to Afghanistan? Maybe?"*

*Mashad: "Yeah, maybe. Maybe I'm gonna live in there, never come back."*

*JH: "Um. It's still dangerous though, isn't it? In Afghanistan..."*

*Mashad: "But I like... cause then I can get the horse and stuff and the cow. I want to see all of them and have a ride till night..."*

Whether he understood the word "dangerous" is not clear, or maybe he was deliberately ignoring it, to focus on the lifestyle and animals he has left behind, just as with Hassan in the book. He is aware of Afghanistan being in a state of war but says he only saw it on TV.

Ahmed was highly aware of the situation in Egypt at the time of the study and spoke about it freely:

*"I'm not going until they stop the war. There's people firing all the places...at the moment. And one person fired a school, um, burned a school...and children died. I'm lucky that I'm .... I escaped before the war... because I was the one who toured my country having a nice Eid there... and I wish the war stops before Eid comes because... people will die then..."*

Despite Ahmed's previous relish of violence, he shows a good understanding here, both of his own position, and of the horror of war. Charlie, his teacher, commented that Ahmed was proud of his homeland, despite its ongoing problems, and noticed a high level of awareness, clearly due to home influences:

*"There's so much... "Egypt is my country"... "I am..."... more so than any other children who were born in a different country or parents from a different country. Whenever he sees anything that's... so he's really aware of what's going on..."*

Debora, however, had only sad memories from Ivory Coast:

*Debora: "My mum didn't have enough money to look after us so she had to sell some of my clothes and make us go back to my... to her country..."*

*JH: "So you were born here and then you went back to the Ivory Coast... Did you go and live with your grandmother, did you say?"*

*Debora: "And the first... when my mum left we had to go to the beach just to forget about to the bad memories and...."*

It seems that recollections of the home country are not dependent on the level of violence there, but on the memories of family, friends and animals that endure. For Debora, Ivory Coast was not her home country, but where she was left by her mother, to live with her grandmother, demonstrating that economic migration can be painful as well.

#### **7.4.2 Identification with language barriers**

In Year 1, Daniel from China, and Maria, from Colombia, both have an understanding of what it is like not to speak the host language, when they return to the heritage country.

*JH: "What do you think it would feel like if you arrived in a classroom not being able to speak the language that all the children could speak?"*

*Maria: "Lonely."*

*Daniel: "Every time I go to China, everyone can talk in Chinese to me, and I don't really know what he's talking about."*

Both these children are used to moving between two worlds and encountering language barriers. They both engage with their countries of origin enthusiastically, the positives and negatives are clear in their minds, and they are keen to share their knowledge with me.

In the Year 3 group discussion, despite his developing level of English acquisition, Mashad shows a good understanding of the story and a close identification with Hassan. He relates the events in the book to his own experience when he arrived in the UK.

*Mashad: "He can't talk English... He talk to the Somali translator, and the translator talk to the children... So Hassan can't talk... Yeah, ... when first time when I came to London... I saw the clouds, grey and I saw my cousin..."*

*JH: "So when you came, could you speak English?"*

*Mashad: "No way... I thought when I was... "What country's this? Why...?"*

*JH: "So did you feel like Hassan did when you arrived in school?"*

*Mashad: "In my dreams, yes."*

When asked to write a diary entry about his first day at school in the role of Hassan, my field notes recorded that Mashad had written two paragraphs, a lot for someone with limited English skills, perhaps due to his personal engagement with the text, pointing out to me that "Hassan can talk, but the other children think he can't speak." This insightful observation was possibly born out of real life experience, based on the reaction of his peers at the time.

### **7.4.3 Dealing with disturbing subject matter**

Charlie felt strongly that Mashad had not been disturbed by the subject matter of *The Colour of Home*:

*“You know, I didn’t get that impression from Mashad, that it was quite disturbing. It was more interest, do you know what I mean? Without ... pulling up memories...”*

This was backed up by my own impressions of Mashad’s participation in class discussions, his enthusiasm to write about the book, as well as his comments in the more intimate situation of the group discussion where such a disclosure might have come out. However it may be that Mashad had been shielded from such experiences in Afghanistan. Ahmed’s comment made clear connections with his own country but was merely candid and matter-of-fact:

*“It reminds me about my country Egypt because people keep on firing on the people of Egypt and the government”*

Debora had already indicated that she did not like reading this book so I asked:

*JH: “Do you think your experience means that you don’t want to read a book like this?”*

*Debora: (big sign and nods) “Yeah.”*

This point of view deserves serious consideration, as she clearly found the book disturbing and it prompted in her an emotional reaction, linked to her past experiences. However it is interesting to note that had the class teacher read the book individually to any refugee children in advance, to test the water, as suggested earlier, there might have been very differing reactions from individual children, perhaps linked more to personality, than direct experience, and Debora would have been left out of this reading.

Asma, who is half Somali, half Zanzibari talked to me animatedly about the book and how it connects directly with her family experience:

*“He’s upset now because the war in his country started and he was really frightened so he wrecked the picture. He wants to go back to his country. It’s really sad, the war in Somalia, because they’re giving children guns. My aunty ran away. She had to run all the way to London. Her feet really hurt. That must be hard.”*

This really sensitive and dramatic comment is followed by another very insightful thought for an 8-year old to have and shows that reading the book, and working on it in class is directly impacting on her peace of mind:

*Asma: "It's actually true. It's serious. I feel really sorry for that. It used to be a really beautiful country and now it's got wrecked. Why would they do that to their own country?"*

*JH: "Are there any bits in the book that you think are frightening?"*

*Asma: "When he does the gun picture, it's a bit scary..."*

As she drew Hassan's picture and then scribbled over it in black and red, I asked her:

*JH: "How does that make you feel, doing that?"*

*Asma: "Sad. I put scars on their faces. And sometimes they have knives so I'll put a knife in it... Blood all over the floor. And that is dramatic, definitely. This is frightening me."*

Because of her family background, although born in the UK, she was able to relate directly to the situation in Somalia, and reflect on the impact that the book was having on her emotionally, an example of an "aesthetic" and an "efferent" reading existing at the same time. Finally she told me she felt sad and I comforted her by saying maybe next week, when we read more of the book, there would be a happy ending. Asma comments: "Always a happy ending." This 'sense of an ending' (Kermode, 1967) has resonance, relating as it does to the idea of narrative closure identified by Belsey (1980), an almost universal feature of children's literature too, especially in the picture book genre. "Loose ends will be tied up, and we will retrospectively come to understand much that has gone before" (Lewis, 1996, p. 265). As seen in Chapter 2, the refugee experience often brings continuing problems for children and families that may linger for many years, and yet the conventions of children's literature, and in particular the picture book, are such that a "happy ending" seems called-for, despite, or perhaps because of, the disturbing subject matter.

#### 7.4.4 Somalia in the spotlight

Reading *The Colour of Home* in the classroom obviously puts Somali children in the spotlight by virtue of the fact that it names the country on the first page. When I asked Jill Rutter, a Refugee Education expert, whether she thought there was a danger of a negative portrayal of Somalia for children with Somali heritage, she commented:

*“There’s an embarrassment and I think among children who come from Africa, the media portrayals of Africa are so negative, and teasing of children about their origins is an issue. It’s not so much the refugee experience, as its origins in Africa that are problematic, and most of the media stories about Somalia at the moment are about pirates or about starvation...”*

As already mentioned in Chapter 6, from the beginning of the reading Nerys, in Year 1, brought out that the book was about Somalia, and indicated the Somali children in the class, thus relating very directly to them. In Nerys’ class, Siham, from Somalia, seemed particularly uncomfortable when the text was being read to the class. She refused to look at the book and avoided eye contact with the teacher and other children. Afterwards the teacher and the teaching assistant tried to talk to her to see if there was any problem, but she refused to engage. Nerys explained that she had specific learning needs and that “It’s difficult for her to articulate actually.” However she clearly was listening to the story, as when the interpreter was mentioned in the text, she rejected another child’s comparison to her, even though her mother did have an interpreter at parent’s evening, displaying understandable sensitivity around the issue.

April’s entrée was more gentle. She introduced Hassan and Somalia and then asked if anyone knew anything about Somalia. In her interview, April was positive about the response:

*“Yes, the Somali children were pleased that it was something from their country...I mean the more books like this, the better... cause we always have Somali children in school, so ... this is a good book for Somali children, definitely.”*

Both Somali children in April's class were second generation migrants (and also probably from a refugee background) but they were happy to talk to me about the country. However both had a fairly negative view of Somalia, Amal commenting that there is still fighting there and Abdi reporting:

*"Some people don't have food there. There are no shops. We would have stayed there but we wanted to have food."*

In Charlie's class the two Somali children, were also both second generation migrants (probably from a refugee background) and had never visited the country. Although she had read the book before, Asma was ambivalent about it being read in front of the whole class:

*"They've got headscarves on like me...All the other children will look at me... I get shy when it is about my country, because everyone looks at me on the carpet, because of what I'm wearing."*

As the reading progressed she whispered to me, "I'm just a fan of this book...I don't want to say it out." Finally she gained confidence and called out to the whole class, "it's from my country...because the lady is wearing this" (pointing to her headscarf).

I reflected after the visit how desperately Asma wanted to be called upon as "the expert" but this was never taken up by the teacher, perhaps out of wariness to highlight an individual child's background publicly in class. On my next visit she tried to share her knowledge of Mimosa trees but was stopped by the teacher. Again her ambivalence to being put in the spotlight was clear.

*JH: "Do you like having a book about Somalia read to the class?"*

*Asma: "No...Because it's embarrassing me... Because everyone just looks at me. Remember last time .. oh my God, oh my God, oh my God!"*

*JH: "But you like the book don't you?"*

*Asma: "I loved it....It's really interesting. I would read it again...I really understand what Hassan meant."*

Later in an individual interview, Asma divulged that she had been disturbed by the book to the extent of dreaming about it, even though the details were hazy:

*Asma: "I don't really like when his face looks really angry cause that's a bit frightening. Cause I had a bad dream last night about that. Gave me a fright."*

*JH: "Did you? Oh no! What about the book?"*

*Asma: "But I just woke up quickly. It was really early morning and I just went back to bed."*

*JH: "Ah. What was the dream?"*

*Asma: "About her son. Her son was coming... I don't really remember."*

It took a long time for Kadiye to open up to me in an interview, being fairly inarticulate, and lacking much appropriate vocabulary to express himself. He displayed a very negative view of Somalia, having no relatives there, only in Kenya.

*"They're a poor country, and there's not much people. It's not a nice country to... It's a dangerous country. It's not nice to go there."*

Kadiye had ambivalent feelings about the text, "cause there are not many books that come from Somalia." Like Asma, he found it embarrassing because other children looked at him, but also stated: "every time I hear the story I like it." Rather than having it shared with the whole class in the Literacy hour, he said "I would read it by myself," but thought it a good idea that other children learn about Somalia.

Many Somali children in the UK only have second hand knowledge of the country, even though they would respond to it as familiar, as Somali parents, in common with most refugee communities, retain strong emotional ties to their place of origin (Kahin, 1997). However, *The Colour of Home* depicts a view of a simple farming lifestyle, which might feed into stereotypes drawn from the media and which may be very different to the Somalia that parents talk about.

Putting Somali children in the spotlight, through a book with negative images of Somalia, may be worse than nothing. Bishop (1990) endorses this view:

*“When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part”* (ibid, n.p).

However, Demie, et al. (2007) identified that inclusion of Somali language and cultural images in the curriculum was important for the raising of children’s self-esteem and achievement. Kruizenga (2010) also pointed out that Somali students, along with all others, should have opportunities to engage in learning and researching about their own identities, and teachers need to create classrooms in which ‘funds of knowledge’ are respected with regards to every children (Moll, et al., 1992). Nevertheless, Botelho & Rudman (2009) point out,

*“One text cannot do it all; it is the reading of multiple texts and the juxtaposition of these texts against lived experience and secondary sources that is central”* (ibid, p. 266).

## **7.5 The “constructed” text**

*“When readers perceive texts as motivated, rather than innocent, they position themselves within an alternative discourse of reading, participating in a critical literacy”* (McDonald, 2004, p. 17).

However, while children were sometimes asked to think about the author’s motive or purpose in writing and the “message” of the book, teachers very rarely departed from reader response to critical literacy, where children consider whether the text is successful in achieving its purpose, and whether it could have been done otherwise, as Comber (2001) suggests that children can, even when young.

*“As readers, students must evaluate the social construction of a text and question the factors that may have influenced the author to create the text in a specific manner” (Coffey, 2008).*

In a discussion group from Nerys’ Year 1 class, children aged between five and six years, offered intelligent responses to my questioning:

*JH: “Does it have some sort of bigger meaning than just telling a story?”*

*“Maybe it was real?”*

*“Maybe she wanted to write a story?”*

*“I think she (the author) had probably been in the same country like those.”*

These are all highly plausible reasons for writing which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, with children perhaps assuming that the author was Somali, and also a refugee.

In a Year 3 discussion group Mashad displayed his interest in the book, by raising the question of the author’s motivation for writing. He was the only child to do so, and at one point asked me if I was the author. He also asked in class discussion, “ Why did she write the story?” As already noted, it is interesting that this was asked by a child, rather than the teacher, and other children make suggestions:

*“To make her famous.” (a perceptive thought here!)*

*“It might have happened to her before.”*

Charlie, the teacher, suggests: “or someone she knows,” and then adds, “Maybe she read an article in the paper and that was a spark.” The children go along with the idea of “intertextuality” by adding, “Maybe she saw it in a TV programme and thought of something to write.”

Even though slightly more sophisticated in expression, the ideas from Year 3 are not radically different to those in Year 1, suggesting personal experience and the practice of writing as motivators, although Year 3 conjecture more

about external catalysts as they inch towards a deeper level of critical engagement. In a discussion group outside the class afterwards, Shanaye, Debora, Peliona, and Asma surmise about the motivations of the author:

*“Maybe she had an uncle or dad who died and who was fighting in the war and one of his mates accidentally shot him...To never forget about her dad.”*

*“Maybe they did this story because some people are very sad about war and who died and who was part of the family and who died.”*

*“I think she did that story to show how people can get frightened and in the end after it they can show the expressions on their faces how they are in their actions...”*

*“To tell the people about what happened to Somalia that day.”*

Here we see a return to the idea of direct experience motivating the author, and/or a desire to communicate to others how people can be affected by civil war and the refugee experience. Hall (1998) argues that readers need to be made aware of the fact that the text is a crafted object, which has ways of presenting ‘reality’, and that both could be otherwise. This understanding needs to be fostered in children, with teachers encouraging them to be

*“actively, and collaboratively, involved in reading beyond the lines and making personal judgments about the extent to which a text has achieved its purpose” (Fisher, 2008, p. 26).*

Charlie’s class were fortunate to have the opportunity to communicate directly with the author, when they interviewed Mary Hoffman on Skype. Charlie felt it gave the class “the sense of a writer and a reader,” a comment which could well be related to the transactional theory of reading propounded by Rosenblatt (1978). Children also had the opportunity to frame questions themselves which, as we have seen, is an important part of critical literacy (Fisher, 2008). However, in practice the children’s questions, prepared in advance and chosen by the teacher, rather than asking about the creation of *The Colour of Home*, tended to focus more on the generalities of authorship such as:

*“What is your favourite story?”*

*“Where do you write?”*

*“Where do you get your ideas?”*

Hoffman was asked about her favourite colour, food etc., although some asked what she like about being an author, when she started writing, and finally what inspired her to write *The Colour of Home*. To the last question she answered that her publisher had asked her to write about refugees, but then she “got really interested in it”. In terms of helping children understand the wider significance of the text, this left a lot to be desired, although it was clearly tailored to the age-group of the class. This points again to the role of the teacher, rather than the author, in locating the text within the larger themes and currents in society that spawn, as in this case, challenging texts, that counter popularist media messages. In the words of Cervetti, et al. (2001):

*“Textual meaning is understood in the context of social, historic, and power relations, not solely as the product or intention of an author. Further, reading is an act of coming to know the world (as well as the word) and a means to social transformation”* (ibid, n.p)

## **7.6 Reflections**

Children who were refugees, or from a refugee background, had experienced voluntary migration, or who had only moved school within the area, or who had never moved at all, all created meaning about the refugee experience from *The Colour of Home*. Across Year 1 and Year 3, there were many differing reader responses, sometimes unexpected, such as when some boys indulged in violent “acting out”, displaying a resistant reading, while girls showed more empathy and some were distressed by the content. Arizpe and Styles (2003) found that even at a young age girls tended to express their feelings more openly. The text served as a catalyst for many children to talk about their own experiences, with some children from refugee or migrant backgrounds relating the story directly to their own lives. While in general, Somali children

welcomed a book that reflected them, they were ambivalent to it being read aloud to the whole class. To this extent the reader

*“provides a context: this is drawn from his own past experience, and depends on his attitudes and values”* (Rosenblatt, 1978, pp. 97-8).

However, it seemed that children from refugee backgrounds included contextual details which seemed to draw on personal experience or wider knowledge, but response to the story across the classes depended perhaps more on individual sensitivities and personalities.

Even children in Year 1 showed an understanding of the three parts of the refugee experience (Hamilton & Moore, 2004), identified with language barriers, empathised with “newness”, and suggested good welcoming strategies, but it was clear that teacher input had a strong influence on response in building a “community” of readers (Chambers, 1991). Significant moments in the text were represented in writing and drawing, but these were often at odds with each other and suggested that children needed the opportunity to enact their response in a variety of ways. Critical literacy suggests that children should be encouraged to investigate the world of the text in relation to their own lived reality, but should also go beyond mere reflections to discuss other possibilities (Hall, 1998), a clear tension with, or complement to reader response. In Year 1 attempts to grapple with the overall “message” in writing were difficult, whereas in Year 3, ideas flowed somewhat better in discussion groups, suggesting that age is a factor in critical engagement, that dialogue rather than written work might be a better forum for this, and that teachers have a key role to play in enabling children to view the text as authored, partial, and arbitrary, and to link it to larger themes.

## **Chapter 8 – *The Other Side of Truth*: Teachers as Mediators**

### **8.1 Introduction**

Like Chapter 6, this chapter again focuses on my second research question,

- **How are these books mediated by teachers when sharing them with children?**

but this time looking at how two teachers in Year 5 shared *The Other Side of Truth* with their classes.

During my interview with Beverley Naidoo (see Chapter 5), she specifically mentioned the teacher, who is in a pivotal position to introduce children to literature about the refugee experience.

*“There are a minority of teachers who talk with the young people who they see every day about the themes that are in those books... They can have the most interesting conversations with them and they’re not promoting themselves as the all-powerful, all knowing encyclopaedia, but as another human being who’s got perhaps more experience, because they’re older and hopefully wiser, and who then has another, perhaps richer, more mature perspective, which doesn’t wipe out the ...freshness of the child’s perspective on what is actually happening.”*

These are useful starting points from which we can examine the role of the teacher when mediating between a text and the class, to engage in critical discussion (Chambers, 1991).

### **8.2 Planning for reader response and critical literacy**

Although Violet had used *The Other Side of Truth* in the classroom before, planning the scheme of work was undertaken by Sophie, as the two teachers

worked in partnership. Both teachers were very enthusiastic about the book, but Sophie immersed herself deeply in research for her planning and produced high-quality, attractive and stimulating lesson resources, which she later posted up on the TES website for other teachers to access. For this reason much of the focus of this section is on Sophie's planning.

### **8.2.1 Sources of inspiration**

Sophie used a website from another Primary School in North London, (Woodberry Down Primary School, n.d.), as her primary source of inspiration. This school has a history of engaging with refugee texts, and had produced a scheme and examples of children's work on *The Other Side of Truth*, all of which were readily available to share. As well as inventive ideas for written responses to the text, the school had taken a cross-curricular approach, incorporating drama, artwork, geography, maths and ICT into the study of the text. When tackling the issue of bullying, which arises in *The Other Side of Truth*, they showed children how to access the Childline website (Childline, n.d.), a valuable lesson in itself, and asked them to compare definitions of bullying found there with the treatment of the principal character, Sade, in the book. They also took the class on the actual "Number 36" bus that Sade and Femi would have gone on when they first arrived in the UK, and had a visit from the author, Beverley Naidoo. Such inventive work, put on a website for others to use, is a gift for teachers who struggle with time factors when planning and producing resources. Furthermore, it promotes "reading the word and the world", as it moves from the text to embrace issues in the wider world of particular concern for children.

By co-incidence, School A had arranged a visit from Millwall Football Club, well known for their outreach programmes in schools, to talk about racism and tackling it. Sophie used this intervention to link with bullying, something that refugees experience often, thus making another connection between the book and the wider world. Also, by chance, Week 5 of the work on *The Other Side of Truth* coincided with Refugee Week, and Sophie was inspired to contact the Refugee Week organisation via their website (Refugee Week, n.d.). They

provided a representative to come and deliver a lesson on what causes people to become refugees, and explain the “Simple Acts” initiative that invited people to take positive social action to welcome and help refugees. Sophie also used a drama scenario, obtained from the Amnesty International website called “Everyone Everywhere – Refugees and Asylum” (Amnesty International, n.d.), in which a fictional situation where a family is threatened, builds up to taking the decision to flee. In groups children role play the discussion that might have taken place amongst the family, prior to flight, and then prepare a list of 10 things to take with them. Involving other organisations and speakers, mentioned above, broadened the “voice” beyond just that of the teacher, to add authenticity and depth, and make connections with the real world.

### **8.2.2 Providing context and tackling challenging issues**

Before children in Year 5 even began to look at *The Other Side of Truth* Sophie had planned to lay the groundwork for its introduction in important ways. Firstly, she had a display in her classroom of books about refugees, as preparation for the concepts that would be dealt with in the reading, using “intertextuality” (Kristeva, 1966). Secondly, she chose to read “Gervelie’s Journey” (Robinson & Young, 2008) to the class, which is a real-life story of a refugee child from the Congo, containing pictures and photographs, and could be covered in its entirety in one lesson as a warm-up. My field notes of the session describe this reading:

*“T. reads “Gervelie’s Journey: A Refugee Diary” as an introduction to the topic. ... They have key words that they are going to write definitions for. Front cover – photo and illustration. Could be a real person. Gervelie moves to Ivory Coast. War there too. Leave Africa. Why “not safe”? Can’t say what country she stopped in with cousins – illegal. Borrowed documents. Introduced as natural.”*

Dolan (2014a) (2014b) proposes a framework of “Respect-Understanding-Action” for promoting development and intercultural education, through critical multicultural analysis (Botelho & Rudman, 2009) in respect of *Gervelie’s Journey*, and here Sophie clearly introduces the first two concepts, leaving the third for the more in-depth study of *The Other Side of Truth* to come.

Use of this book demonstrated clearly from the outset that the experiences in both books happen to real children (Rutter, 1994), engendering respect. In sharing a short version of a refugee story as a swift overview, Sophie skilfully introduced concepts to aid understanding of asylum, illegal entry and the use of fake identification documents, as in *The Other Side of Truth*. She then asked children to match words such as “Refugee”, “War”, “To Flee”, “Visa”, “Passport”, “Asylum”, “Immigration control”, “Refugee Council”, “Hostel”, and “Lawyer”, to given definitions. In doing so, she demonstrated her own in-depth contextual knowledge of immigration control, a factor that is crucial to the success of such lessons, but which many teachers do not have and is dealt with more thoroughly later in the chapter. As Freire states,

*“The starting point is what the teacher knows about the object and where the teacher wants to go with it”* (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 103).

As a follow-up lesson, Sophie planned for children to use non-fiction sources such as books, atlases, photos, and magazine articles for researching about Nigeria in general, through a variety of headings such as: people, countryside, cities, school and education, landscape and climate, culture and food. Here we see more “intertextuality”, this time with non-fiction texts, and more “reading of the world”. The activity also highlighted famous Nigerians such as Ken Saro-Wiwa’s daughter and the pop star Tinie Tempah, which surprised many children as they had thought the latter was American. Furthermore a map of Nigeria was provided in the centre of the sheet they were to work on, providing initial locational knowledge, although not linked to Africa or the UK at this stage. (Later maps of Africa, with Nigeria highlighted, are stuck in books.) Generally, however, this provided good background work, prior to reading the text, setting the book in a world-wide and national context, and establishing positive images of Nigeria from the outset.

Use of the internet, for access to wider sources of information, was encouraged by Sophie in many ways. When garnering facts about Ken Saro-Wiwa, whose death was a major inspiration for writing *The Other Side of Truth* (discussed in Chapter 5), children were directed to online newspaper articles,

a Youtube film of him talking, and a BBC news video about his memorial bus in London, including his son's reaction to the initiative. Through this research, children had a palpable sense that the text could lead them to find out more about the world around them, and link with real people, dead or alive, who had inspired the book. As Sophie said in her interview, she would have also liked to have linked socio-political aspects of bullying and racism against refugees to the case to Damilola Taylor, to whom the book is dedicated, but ran out of time for this work.

*“I did intend to have a lesson about Damilola Taylor at the end. We didn't have enough time. So I probably would cut out some of the Refugee Week things, or maybe a bit less of the bullying, to try and get the Damilola Taylor story in because I think it's so important and so local and so relevant to the book that we really should have covered it.”*

During the six weeks spent studying *The Other Side of Truth*, Year 5 children addressed many challenging concepts and issues with opportunities to focus on socio-political issues. The story itself engages with bribery and corruption by police and government, a difficult concept for some children, but only too familiar for others. They also discussed children going into care, and what fostering actually means, the idea of emergency housing, hostels, and the role of social workers in society. They were asked to contemplate the death of a parent and how they would deal with bereavement, the affective reading of the text being brought to the forefront here. They also learnt about the deportation of failed asylum seekers, through making a link with X factor contestant, Gamu Nhengu, who had been fighting forced return to Zimbabwe, an issue that children in the class may well have been aware of. No wonder Sophie commented:

*“so much that we did try and go into, but you feel like you are just tapping the very surface...”*

### **8.2.3 Dovetailing with the Literacy curriculum**

In her interview, Sophie spoke about the tensions between reading a class novel in its entirety and meeting the National Curriculum in England learning

objectives for Literacy which tended to be focussed on written responses (cf. Chapter 6).

*“... like Violet said about it being too long, I had to read more out of the Literacy lesson, because too many of my Literacy lessons were just reading at them and I didn’t therefore get to teach the objective and they didn’t do enough work themselves so it was just a lot of listening and copying down words they liked, which is fine. I should be doing that anyway.”*

The use of vocabulary here is interesting. Sophie bemoans “reading at them” (not “reading *with* them”), because she couldn’t “teach the objective”, and also the children “didn’t do enough work themselves,” here referring to independent written work, rather than dialogic class or group work. In the primary age range, reading of a text at this level by themselves will be beyond some children in the class, so the whole book has to be read in class time. For this reason, much literacy teaching at present is dependent on the use of extracts rather than the reading of a whole book, and the practice continues into Secondary School (Collins, 2005). However this deprives children of the process of sharing a class novel, which can be an intimate, relaxing and bonding, if not emotional, experience for both teacher and children, (ibid; Habib, 2008) and one that many adults remember with fondness from their childhood. Reading the whole book together also provides an opportunity for discussion about and beyond the book (Chambers, 1991) (Barrs & Cork, 2001) (McDonald, 2004) where critical literacy and dialogic pedagogy can be played out. Furthermore the full implications of a text such as *The Other Side of Truth* would be lost if just dealt with through extracts, the story building into a climax, with heightened tension, and issues growing larger throughout.

The next example echoes findings in Chapter 6, where teachers’ preoccupation with learning objectives set in advance, direct and shape the ensuing dialogue. The opening scene of *The Other Side of Truth* is detailed in Chapter 1, and could be described as one of the most dramatic story openers in any children’s novel. It contains a short, sharp, enigmatic description of Mama being shot on the drive, written in italics using the present tense. The next paragraph moves to plain type and the past tense, as the children sit in

the living room while the doctor comes to examine Mama, and pronounces her dead. Using an idea from the Woodberry Downs website, Year 5 were asked to respond to the juxtaposition of present and past tense, and examine its effect, rather than asking the children to pick out what literary features cause the heightened sense of drama themselves, which would have empowered them to come up with their own answers. My field notes stated:

*“Two ways of looking at this – killing the text by reducing it to a grammar lesson, OR good to base grammar lesson on such a radical text.”*

At this point in my observations I was unsure of whether the book was being used to fit the literacy targets, or if the learning objectives were being manipulated to fit in with the emotional weight of the text. As we have seen previously, critical literacy is entirely contingent “on educators’ professional ingenuity in navigating the enabling and disabling local contexts of policy” (Luke, 2012, p. 9). As the weeks rolled out, I grew to admire these two teachers more and more for their skill and expertise in drawing out language appreciation from the text and developing literacy tasks which aimed to improve children’s writing, while not detracting from the power and meaning of *The Other Side of Truth*. My field notes show details whilst in Violet’s class:

*“A prepared diary entry by Femi. At the airport, opened their bags, X-rayed suitcase and him. Very imaginative .... Written by T? Have to find synonyms for his feelings – adjectives. Using dictionaries. Children come up with good synonyms.”*

*“T points out language devices as she reads – simile, metaphors, etc. T. reading chapters which are about fostering, social services and flashbacks. Bringing out points of info from text, and also highlighting similes, tenses etc. They have to write speech bubbles for 6 characters – what they might be thinking, using connectives – Sade, Femi, Robert, Mrs Graham, Kevin, Jenny.”*

Furthermore, a sample of Week 3’s learning objectives show how the dry language of the National Curriculum in England was transformed into a more active response, linked to the Literacy curriculum to justify their inclusion:

*LO: "I can choose form and content for a purpose." In pairs typing (School A) Chronicle article about Beverley Naidoo's visit. Winning article to be published in newsletter.*

*LO: "I can engage in challenging subject matter" Discussing terms: "asylum" "refugee" and stereotypes of each. Looking at facts about Ken Saro-Wiwa*

*LO: "I can identify different question types and evaluate their impact." In pairs, children write questions to ask Sade and Mr Nathan as Immigration Officers.*

The first activity involves writing for a real purpose and real audience – the school community, and gives children a chance to report a first-hand experience. The second one is indeed challenging, tackling aspects of the refugee process, and fact-finding about the man who influenced the book's inception and stands as a role model of bravery and challenge. Finally questioning is used to simulate a highly contentious area – that of the attitude of immigration officials when dealing with asylum seekers. This activity led on to a role play, using the questions developed, with the teacher and teaching assistant playing the parts of immigration officers, interrogating Sade and Mr Nathan, who were acted by children. The variety of tasks here demonstrate how the curriculum can be shaped imaginatively to take literacy far beyond the book, dovetailing creatively with National Curriculum in England learning objectives.

In Week 4, my field notes show doubts creeping in again:

*"The exercise is to describe feelings and provide evidence. Do we always have evidence in the text? Is some of the work rather contrived to meet literacy goals rather than just a response to the text in the most suitable way?"*

This links with Iser's (1976, first published in English in 1978) concept that the writer leaves "gaps" or "blanks", which are as important as the text, as they stimulate meaning while the reader reconstitutes the work, and encourage the use of imagination, bringing in personal interpretation. The teacher is clearly driven by literacy objectives to provide evidence from the text, but is denying children the opportunity to move beyond the book, as described by Yandell

(2013), and build their own construction, based on their individual reader response.

However this is the week when children also access the Childline website (Childline, n.d.), discussed earlier, under the learning objective of “I can retrieve information from a text”, and create a poster encouraging children facing bullying to get help from Childline, with the learning objective of “I can use persuasive language.” These are more examples of where the functional language of the NLS is transformed into purposeful and creative activities planned by the Year 5 teachers. Finally this week, under “I can imagine and explore feelings”, a more hopeful objective in terms of affective work, children have to re-write the story of Mariam, another refugee in the book, from third person to first person, detailing her harrowing journey on foot from Somalia to Kenya and thence to the UK. This task, though seeming somewhat pedestrian, had led children to identify directly with Mariam, clearly meeting the more creative intention.

At the end of the research period however, my field notes questioned the pedagogy when I sampled Year 5 literacy journals to look at reader response. One comment runs:

*“Literacy journal: Write LI “I can make notes.” How deadly!”*

- a further reflection on the “functional literacy” approach, an aspect that I clearly felt robbed the class of the opportunity to respond with critical literacy to a book that begs to be read in a socio-political framework. Similarly my field notes recorded a disappointment with the scope of children’s responses and the teachers’ marking of their literacy journals.

*“Looking at their books. All content ignored by T in the “suggestions for improvement” section. Focussing entirely on capital letters, punctuation, use of connectives, sentence starters etc. T may compliment content but does not draw out what makes it good. Responses in writing frames etc. All very formulaic. Not much space for individual interpretations/meanings/bringing own experiences to bear.”*

### 8.2.4 Making connections

Sophie pointed out in her interview that *The Other Side of Truth* had made many connections around the world, and with the international and multi-cultural make up of her Year 5 class:

*“The book covering Nigeria, Somalia, the UK aspect and also even Jamaica with the foster family and then you’ve got Beverley’s background of South Africa and apartheid, so there are all of those issues. You know, in this class I’ve got Olu from Nigeria, Hedley who’s Jamaican and Dawo who’s Somali and a few others...it’s really good for them to have that extra link into the book as well...”*

In writing their own dramatic story starter, echoing the beginning paragraph and beyond, Sophie helped Year 5 give their writing a Nigerian flavour, as my notes show below:

*“T. has supplied some Nigerian names. What a good idea! ... Children use the Nigerian names in very dramatic story openers generally about shooting.”*

Sophie’s planning encouraged “interrogating multiple view-points”, seen as an important component of critical literacy. She stimulated children through various activities to respond through the eyes of the many characters, and represent differing perspectives in the story. For example, children were asked to write in role as Femi, thinking about his feelings on the aeroplane, and a diary entry on arrival at Heathrow Airport, taking in issues such as bribery, trafficking, and false passports. My field notes taken in Violet’s class record:

*“They have to imagine they are all Femi:...*

- *Having their passports checked*
- *Customs officers take an hour to check all their bags.*
- *Uncle Dele not meeting them in Arrivals hall.”*

As already stated, children also compiled questions for the immigration officers, which gave them an opportunity to investigate the reasons behind UK Border Agency discourses, and to understand the arguments against allowing

free access to immigration, which are prevalent in the media and also now in government. It is important for children to access controversial, contradictory and interdependent discourses, and to make up their own minds on challenging issues. This is the kind of dialogue that Beverley Naidoo would want her books to stimulate.

The use of drama is particularly effective when interrogating multiple view points, as pupils enter into other situations and roles, and can become very involved with the characters they are representing. Towards the end of studying the book, my field notes record:

*“They are to act the interview with Uncle Dele, Sade and Femi outside the detention centre where their father is. Shown on news. Create questions first. Children come up with ideas of questions really quickly. They are well into the situation.”*

Following this children wrote up a news report of the interview, taking conflicting positions, arguing for and against offering refugee status to Papa, and they had the opportunity to understand yet again why this is a contested and controversial issue. At one point Sophie found the interrogation of multiple viewpoints quite challenging for her as a teacher. She found allowing children to take up the stance of resistant reader almost too much to acquiesce to:

*“There’s a point later on in the book where the Nigerian government has said to the UK government, ‘Papa, he murdered his own wife, and he needs to be returned to Nigeria to face trial’ or whatever... and at that point a couple of the smarter girls in the class were saying, ‘oh, well maybe he did!’ and they were trying to argue with the Nigerian government as if maybe to say ‘Well, they could be right.’”*

The “letting-go” of control by the teacher is difficult, especially when dealing with controversial issues, and when the teacher feels strongly about the subject, but in order for really open dialogue to occur this minimal interference is important.

### 8.2.5 The “constructedness” of the text

From the outset of the project, Sophie had set out a selection of other books by Beverley Naidoo at the side of the classroom, making a direct connection to the author via “intertextuality” and highlighting the “constructedness” of the text. She downloaded a video of Naidoo reading the opening paragraph of book from the BBC website, so the children had a visual and auditory notion of the author, and also a visit to Year 5 from Naidoo herself was arranged (see Figure 23). Naidoo, as seen in the quotes from her interview at the beginning of this chapter, is an author who is passionate about making connections between “the word and the world”, and entering into dialogue with readers. She continually makes school visits and is expert at engaging an audience of children. Myhill (2007) suggests:

*“Questioning the author alters the nature of the task from open-ended enquiry to critical thinking about authors and texts and how every text is an artefact, something created which has a purpose” (ibid, p. 62).*

Obviously questions suggested by Comber such as “Who has produced the text, under what circumstances, and for which readers?” (2001, p. 1) can be addressed at an optimal level when meeting the author in person. For Year 5, when Naidoo visited the school, dialogic teaching was at its peak, with children able to see that the author’s discourse is subjective and “polysemic” (Bakhtin, 1981), as Naidoo outlined the myriad of influences on her writing. My field notes recorded part of her assembly:

*“BN...begins talking about S.Africa. She shows her notebook from Feb-Dec 1997 in which she did her research for “The Other Side of Truth”. BN talks about Ken Saro-Wiwa. Novel begins day after weekend that he was executed. She relates Saro-Wiwa to Papa. Both writers... Shows pictures of Nigeria she took on her research trip. Lagos, forest, Ife. “Sade’s hill.” “Mama’s lemon tree. Picture of immigration office. Explains how she went to Croydon, Lunar House.”*

Children had the chance to hear a talk from Naidoo about her life and work in an assembly situation, and then ask authentic questions, (as Sophie commented “the idea was to stage it like a news conference”) in direct contrast to the usual “authoritative discourse”, where the teacher is usually the questioner (Cazden, 1988), discussed in Chapter 6. They had consulted her

website to find out information about her prior to the visit, and to prepare their questions in advance, which resulted in intelligent and penetrating questions. My fieldnotes recorded:

*“Some asked her on the way in “is Papa going to be OK?”!!”*

*“Someone asked (reflecting on her account of her anti-apartheid activism) : “what was it like to be the only one who wasn’t racist?”!!!”*

She then joined them in the classroom for a more intimate rapport, where she engaged closely in personal dialogue, with plenty of opportunities for pupils to direct the topic, and build on the answers to ask more probing questions. After the event Naidoo wrote about the visit in her blog, thanking the children as “I was reminded yesterday of the pleasure of visiting young readers in school” (Naidoo, 2012). She included a photograph of her reading to the children in the assembly hall (see below). All of this was collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful, the key ingredients identified by Alexander (2008) as essential to good dialogic teaching.



**Figure 23: Beverley Naidoo reading to Year 5 on her visit to the school**

As Sophie commented in her interview:

*“I think they really felt that the book was very important in the year...For the author to come in really kind of raised the significance of it and raised its profile, and that not only are they then seeing the book from Sade’s point of view, but they are sort of seeing it from Beverley’s point of view. Why she chose to write it. So it was really great for covering those ... reading objectives about why would the author choose to write this and what effect does this have on the reader? And I think that’s really brilliant to be able to hear from the author about her writing style, what her background is and then to try and pick up that as you are continuing to read the book...”*

### **8.3 Teachers mediating the text**

#### **8.3.1 Sharing the script**

Sophie transferred the whole of *The Other Side of Truth* to the Interactive White Board (IWB), so that the text was displayed large for the children to follow while both teachers read it aloud to their class. As with other teachers (particularly *The Colour of Home* in Year 1) she mediated the text during the reading, occasionally “translating” it into more accessible language, but generally kept this to a minimum, as my notes record:

*“T tries to translate it in easier more understandable terms. She asks children to read from time-to-time to vary the voice. She doesn’t comment much but lets the text talk for itself and keeps the momentum up.”*

Violet, the other Year 5 teacher, was able to display the text on her IWB too and saw this as a huge asset for the class. She stated in her interview:

*“Thanks to Sophie, it made it easier for the children to understand because they had it, visualised it. I think if ... I just stood in front of the class and read the book, I think I would have lost them ages ago and they wouldn’t have really understood what was going on in the book, but because it was on the board and had images, I think that really helped.”*

The use of Interactive White Boards (IWB's) has been hugely contested since their inception and adoption in the British schools across the board, through large-scale government investment between 2003 and 2005. In this context, Levy (2002) argued that the scale of IWBs meant that visual information could be more easily shared, thereby "drawing the class together" (ibid, p. 11) and both Year 5 teachers, as confident ICT users, were able to use the IWB to great effect to enhance their teaching and the students' learning.

### 8.3.2 Questioning and discussion

Four extracts from my field notes demonstrate class discussion in Year 5 during my observation in the two classrooms. The first is an example of pure "monologism" or "recitation script" as Violet asked the children to recap on the story so far (possibly partly for my benefit - the effect of the presence of the researcher not to be overlooked - as I sat taking notes):

*T recaps. Synopsis.*

*Ch: "Two chn, brother and sister. Their Dad was telling the Truth about something..."*

*T: "About what?"*

*Chn: "There's a war on. The people are coming after the Dad. The people they are telling the truth about."*

*T: "Who decided they should go?"*

*Chn: "Their Aunty."*

*T: "Who do they go with? Who is Mrs Bankole? Are they happy?"*

*Chn: "No."*

*T: "What happened?"*

*Chn: "She abandoned them."*

*T: "Where?"*

*Chn: "Victoria Station café...."*

The questions and answers continued, but this extract is sufficient to demonstrate the point. The children are given closed questions, answer briefly, and no cumulative interrogation was built on their contributions.

However later on my field notes record during a reading of the text that Violet encourages varied reader response explicitly, while building a “community” of readers as described by Chambers (1991).

*“Questioning as she reads, T. shapes understanding. But she repeats that they can have their own interpretation and each may be different.”*

The next example occurred in Sophie’s classroom, as she read “Gervelie’s Journey”, before embarking on *The Other Side of Truth*:

*Two family members killed. T. reads dispassionately. Children register quiet shock.*

*T. “In a war innocent people also die. How would you feel?”*

*Chn: “Guilty” “Sad”*

*T. “Fled, flee. What does it mean?”*

*Ch: “Have to leave.”*

*Boy says something about fighting.*

*T: “You have to think about the consequences.” She reminds children it is a sad and serious story....*

*T: “How would Gervelie be feeling?”*

*Ch: “Stressed.” “Have to start all over again each time.” “Have to leave Xbox and football.” “Leave all your friends behind.” “Unsettled.” “Like you don’t belong.”*

Here we see a much more open style of questioning, with children being asked to relate the incidents in the story to their own feelings, and the responses are perceptive and moving. The teacher is clearly in charge of questioning, but the children can offer a variety of responses, not just what she has in mind. At times, she stamps her own standpoint clearly on the discussion, but as the ideas begin to flow, children build on each other’s contributions and contribute well to the discussion. The cumulative aspect promoted by Alexander (2008) is present, but the teacher keeps firm hold of the reins, leading and controlling the flow, so that Skidmore’s (2000) “dialogic pedagogy” with only “light touch” intervention, is not evident.

The third extract shows a clear example of pedagogical dialogue rather than dialogical pedagogy (ibid). My field notes of the session, discussing the effect of tenses on the drama of the opening sequence (previously mentioned), record this process in Sophie's class:

*T. highlights verbs on board.*

*Discussion of how to change present to past: add –ed*

*T: "What effect does the switch in tenses have?" Difficult question.*

*T: "How does it make the reader feel?"*

*Ch: "Emotional, because somebody dies in there."*

*T: "Good. It makes the reader connect because it is in present tense."*

*Ch: "It brings a tear to your eye – the gun, the screams."*

*Ch: "It makes it feel like it's happening right now."*

*T: "I'm looking for a word beginning with "e" ..."*

*Ch: "Empathy."*

*T: "Empathy with characters."*

The ideas are introduced by the teacher, rather than emanating from the children, starting with the use of past and present tense to build up dramatic tension, and neglecting other techniques such as sentence structure and word choice. The "discussion" is strictly teacher questioning, where wonderful answers supplied by the children about the effects of the device, ("it brings a tear to your eye," "it makes it feel like it's happening right now,") are overlooked, in favour of the one word the teacher has in mind, and which she even supplies the first letter for them to guess at. Once this word "empathy" has been ascertained, the teacher displays her approbation by repeating "empathy with characters". The suggestion earlier of another word, ironically also beginning with an "e", and arguably more apposite – "emotional", had been well received, but was steered to fit the objective of the lesson, rather than being built on cumulatively.

Sophie also used a drama scenario, called "Everyone Everywhere – Refugees and Asylum", previously mentioned (Amnesty International, n.d.). This dialogic activity is collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful

(Alexander, 2008), see Chapter 3, being similar in nature to the work devised by the LA advisor for Year 3 (see Chapter 6), and invites children to empathise with the refugee experience via drama, and creative thinking. It also uses all the dimensions of critical literacy proposed by Lewison et al (2002) (see Chapter 3) in that it disrupts the commonplace, interrogates multiple viewpoints, focuses on socio-political issues, and even promotes taking social action (the most difficult aspect to achieve, in Lewison's view). My field notes record this process, but also demonstrate that however discursive the activity, teachers may be so intent on providing clarity, that they turn a potentially dialogic lesson back into the habitual teacher-questioning and pupil-response that the task strives to avoid:

*They work through "Everyone Everywhere – Refugees and Asylum", reading a section at a time.*

*T. explains that it is a similar situation. She explains each piece carefully. Map of the journey drawn on the board including desert and high forest with trees.*

*T: might be snakes, foxes, ants, spiders, wolves. Dangerous by car. Imagine what you have to carry. "What would you do? Imagine you are 4 characters."*

*T: "What might the mum say?"*

*Chn: "It's dangerous for the kids."*

*T: "What would the 12 year old girl say?"*

*Chn: "She might be frightened and that they might not have enough food."*

*T: "What would the boy say?"*

*Chn: "I don't want to go. I will miss my friends."*

*T: "What might the dad say?"*

*Chn: "We have to go because it's too dangerous."*

### **8.3.3 Teachers' own experiences**

As noted in Chapter 6, teachers' own experiences are an important influence on what they bring to a particular book, and in this case the point is particularly pertinent. With such emotive and challenging subject matter, the personal

involvement of the teacher could add an invaluable dimension to the lesson. For example, as with Year 3, the substitute teacher, Sam, visited Year 5 and talked about his experiences of arriving in the UK from South Africa, without personal connections, work, housing or family to help him make the transition. My field notes record some of the interaction, and my observations on the lesson:

*Sam talks: "What I'm going to recount to you is what happened to me." Talking about leaving his family. Coming to a new country. Leaving children and wife. Crying.*

*Chn: "How can you remember?"*

*Children listen intently. Immigration people gave him a hard time. But had all legal papers. Nobody turned up to meet him. Traumatic. Didn't know anyone. Feelings of being struck at the airport. Journey to Catford. Dazed. Taken in by people. Stayed for 6 months. Wished he was going home.*

Again this made the situation real to the class, and they were lucky that Sam was willing to share his story, especially coming from a teacher with status in the school, which lent it an air of respectability that might be lacking in other depictions of refugees they might have encountered.

Sophie was also willing to demonstrate her connection with another country, in this case Germany. In introducing the book she had found different covers of *The Other Side of Truth* which she displayed on the IWB, a good way to demonstrate how the book has been translated into many languages and is read around the world (a point that Beverley Naidoo also demonstrated in connection with all her books during her school visit). Sophie drew attention to one that was in German and told the class that she would be able to read this, as she is a German-speaker. Such an explicit statement of multilingualism as a personal asset would be useful for children if they spoke other languages than English too. This is also relevant to the book itself, as Sade is supposed by other children not to speak English properly, although she is completely fluent in the language, as well as Yoruba.

However in conversation with Sophie later, I discovered that she had a much closer personal connection with the book, as my notes recorded:

*“Sophie talked about her own background. She told me how her grandparents were Jewish refugees from Germany in 1939, escaping through Sweden and that this had had a lasting effect on her father.”*

This snippet of information is of great significance. It meant that Sophie herself was from a refugee background, albeit nearly 75 years ago, and as discussed in previous chapters, this experience can have a lasting legacy for a family. Her more personal connection to the subject matter may have given Sophie a greater motivation to connect children to the messages and themes in the book, fuelling her enthusiasm to put an enormous amount of effort into planning the lessons, thinking of innovative and purposeful ideas, and gathering and producing high quality resources. It was striking that Sophie had not felt it opportune to share some of her family story with the class, so that they could see yet more teacher experiences that linked with the text. Teachers may be reticent to share personal details with their class, but possibly Sophie did not realise how she could have offered a connection with the book, via her own family story.

Violet must also have had a migration story in her background, as she was of Caribbean heritage. Also interestingly, she never alluded to this, or saw fit to share her family history, or makes links with her cultural origins, either with me or the class. Obviously this is her right, but again, it would have been another aspect of uprooting and resettling that could have added to the children’s appreciation of the wide gamut of influences meeting in such a multi-cultural school, and adding to the rich fabric of the classroom discourses. Furthermore it would have supported those children who shared a background similar to Violet’s to appreciate that their heritage and family history had value that could be brought to bear on the reading of *The Other Side of Truth*, and that they are not just reading about others, but also about themselves. Violet’s engagement with migration in the class was very relaxed, as discussed later, and she also tackled language issues head on, drawing attention explicitly to the fact that

newcomers in class might well speak English fluently, as she mentioned in her interview:

*“There was the thing with Sade when the teacher, when the children were assuming she couldn’t speak good English and it was saying you don’t judge someone just because they come from another country, because in that country they may speak English as well as us if not better. Sade was an example of that.”*

It may be that her own experience of family migration with English as a first language was apposite here, though again she did not refer to it.

### **8.3.4 Teachers’ contextual knowledge**

Linked to teachers’ own experience is the importance of contextual knowledge when leading discussions about any area, but particularly when challenging and controversial, as with the issues raised by *The Other Side of Truth*. It has already been mentioned that during the reading of and questioning following “Gervelie’s Journey” Sophie had displayed in-depth understanding of immigration control. Dolan (2012) stresses that “educators need to be well versed themselves in the complexities of these perspectives and the political frameworks underpinning these concepts” (ibid, n.p.). Whether Violet teaching the same thing in the next room was able to tackle the technical aspects of the refugee situation arising from the text was unknown, as I was observing in Sophie’s class at the time. Where Sophie admitted to struggling with explanations was in the area of institutionalised bribery and corruption:

*“explaining to the children about, for instance the Nigerian dictatorship cause I find it hard maybe to imagine a government that’s doing the wrong thing in such a massive way, or corrupt soldiers, or policemen who are taking bribes. For me, it’s not something I know. Some of the children said they’d seen it or they’d heard about it, but they were asking questions like “Why don’t you... in Nigeria, why didn’t you just go to the police?” and that sort of thing, and it was hard to explain it...”*

Finally, a comment in Sophie’s interview demonstrated how a project such as reading *The Other Side of Truth* with a class, can spark an interest with teachers that lead them on to further learning as Freire envisages: “the ability

of the educator to know the object is remade every time..." (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 100).

*"Linking with the Refugee Week website, I was then just looking through local events and I found the Weiner Library in London had an Austrian film that I went to see during the Refugee Week and they mentioned the Kindertransport, which I don't know a lot about, and I wonder if that's sort of similar because I guess all these children arrived in London and they couldn't all been met by social services and families..."*

Thus Sophie was building on her experience of teaching the text, to develop her own contextual knowledge further. This dynamic relationship between teacher and pupils in the learning process is exactly what Freire (ibid) propounds, and produces the best teaching and learning experiences for all involved.

## **8.4 Teachers' perceptions**

### **8.4.1 Awareness of refugee children in the class**

Using the method described in Chapter 4 for estimating how many children are possibly from a refugee background, and referring to school statistics (see Appendix 4), it can be seen that there may be nine or ten children, out of 26, in each Year 5 class whose family circumstances should be taken into consideration when reading a text such as *The Other Side of Truth* in the classroom. It was noted in Chapter 6 that generally teachers were unaware of the number of refugee children in the class and some did not even make obvious connections between children's country of origin and their immigration status. However, as already mentioned, my notes from a visit to Violet's class show that she did not shy away from embracing the idea of migration in the children's background:

*"T challenges assumptions that children from other countries can't speak English, mentioned in text. She asks how many born elsewhere? Three out of 16. One from Romania. T points out that they all speak English. Relaxed manner of referring to those not born here."*

Violet also voiced an awareness of the number of refugee children in her class, although I was not sure how she had come to this assumption, perhaps confusing migrants with refugees:

*“I think I’ve got about four in my class, they have been refugees. They’ve come over from another country.”*

She thought that one child who had arrived from the Ivory Coast, traumatised by witnessing the death of his mother, may have discussed his situation with the teaching assistant who worked with him, through contact in the previous school year, but not with her. Another child however came forward and spoke to the author, Beverley Naidoo during her visit to Year 5, and made an important disclosure, as her blog after the event recorded:

*“Yesterday, when it was time to go home, a girl with deep enquiring eyes came up to me. ‘Have you ever written a story about a child in a refugee camp?’ she asked. I replied, ‘Have you ever been in a refugee camp?’ Yes, she said softly. She had stayed in a camp when she was five years old.”*

Violet observed that this child did not seem disturbed in any way when the book was read in class. Whether the child had told Beverley Naidoo this in confidence was not known, but I wondered if she had been happy about her disclosure being revealed so publicly in a blog. Tellingly, the girl did not talk to the teacher about it afterwards, reinforcing the notion that refugee status carries with it such stigma that students are reluctant to divulge it, even to their teachers (as discussed in Chapter 6). This, coupled with the problems of teacher access to data on individual children’s migration status, (also mentioned in Chapter 6), indicates the difficulties teachers have in knowing which children in their class may be refugees.

In contrast, Sophie was candid about the fact that she did not have this knowledge. After I took several of her children out to participate in a discussion group, I wrote the following observations in my field notes:

*“Discussion with Sophie afterwards. She is really surprised that so many children come from refugee backgrounds. She hadn’t realised before. We discussed how this has an effect on children... Also talked about how hard it is for Ts to know all this about the children in their classes as they never get a chance to work in a small group with them.”*

However the year after I did the research in Sophie and Violet’s classrooms, I received an email from Sophie containing the following news:

*“We’ve started reading *The Other Side of Truth* with Year 5 and I had to email you because one child in my class has said he was in Sade and Femi’s position - he came to London on a false passport with a stranger. He talked today a bit about having to pretend he had a different name. I’ve been so surprised, partly that it’s this boy and not others, as well as his confidence to talk about it, that I haven’t said very much about it. We’ve just heard his fairly factual recounting of it.”*

What is striking here is the ability of reading a book to open up dialogue with children. As with much research, the most valuable data arises after the microphone has been switched off, or the researcher has left the field! Again, Sophie had not known about the presence of a refugee child in the classroom, had been impressed with his confidence, and had not felt able to build on his experience when he initially divulged it. The stigma of “refugeeness” is indeed a powerful one, so that it affects teachers as well as students, in their avoidance of the subject (also seen in Chapter 6).

#### **8.4.2 Using and understanding the term “refugee”**

In contrast to *The Colour of Home*, *The Other Side of Truth* uses the term “refugee” several times, and invites a discussion of its meaning. Right from the start, while the class were reading the blurb, looking at the covers and discussing what the book might be about, one child, Solange, made the connection, as my field notes show:

*T: “From the covers, what do you think this might be about?”*

*Ch: “Telling lies” “Telling the truth”*

*T reads the blurb. Gives away a lot of the story!*

*T: “Given the blurb and glossary, predict what book might be about.”*

*Solange makes the connection: "It's about refugees."*

*T. very praising. They discuss in pairs...*

*T (reading) "Sade and Femi will flee the country at once and alone."*

*T: "escaping, getting away."*

*Ch: "They might go through tough times with immigration because they are foreigners and they weren't born here." "There will be some lies told."*

The title of Chapter 16 is "Refugees?", describing when the social worker tries to find out more of the children's story and suggests that they will have to apply for asylum, "you know, to be treated as refugees" (Naidoo, 2000, p. 77). Sade, the main character, registers surprise on her face at this disclosure but after the social worker has gone we are made privy to her thoughts:

*"Refugee? They were those winding lines of starving people, with stick-thin children. People who carried their few possessions in dusty cotton bundles, struggling across deserts and mountains. Refugees were people trying to escape famine and war. You saw them on television. Were she and Femi really refugees?" (ibid, p. 78)*

Clearly the author aims through the book to combat the stereotypical view of refugees, but this negative image is not one that would inspire refugee children to identify as such, and I would suggest needs to be challenged immediately during any reading. Later on when Sade and her foster carer are being shown round her new school by a young teacher "Miss Harcourt's cheeks had flushed a deep crimson when Aunt Gracie mentioned 'refugees'" (ibid, p. 104). Again the term is seen as a source of stigma and embarrassment, and would suggest that there is a need for further discussion about why this should be.

### **8.4.3 Children's engagement and understanding**

When asked if the issues raised by the book had been difficult to deal with at any stage, Violet was adamant that this had been an important part of the reading:

*“It wasn’t difficult to deal with. In fact, it was quite the opposite. It was good that it was brought up because we had really good discussions about bullying and about racism and applying to issues that had been going on in like today’s world, so it was a good thing. There wasn’t anything negative about it.”*

Sophie felt that children may have been moved by the difficult issues that were raised in the book, but not upset by them in the long term:

*“They were kind of shocked in the moment of reading it, like the mugging and... but I don’t really think they were disturbed. I can’t imagine them going home and having nightmares, I don’t know... I liked the way all those issues were built into the book, and the children already feel sympathy, or understand Sade from the beginning, so anything difficult, they are sort of seeing it through Sade’s eyes. I don’t know... somehow I think it cushions it.”*

In terms of pupils’ understanding of the term “refugee”, Sophie felt that the children in her class had not had a clear idea of the meaning prior to reading the book. Violet felt that apart from the four refugees she had identified in her class ...

*“The others, I don’t know if they had any real views. Any views that they did have, they would have got from family, or things that they’ve overheard, they maybe didn’t know the truth ...”*

Neither teacher identified any anti-refugee prejudice either amongst the children or the wider community, and Violet felt that the book had had a powerful effect in connecting children to the concept, especially as the refugees in the book were of a similar age to them, which helped them to identify and empathise with them. “I think they’re more aware of how refugees are.”

#### **8.4.4 Taking “social action”**

Sophie discussed the possibility that learning about the refugee situation via *The Other Side of Truth* would lead to reflection and a long term change in attitudes and behaviour, the “social action” which might be a consequence of good critical literacy. However she questioned whether this was realistically possible:

*“Once you have done all the definition work, and you hope that they’ve got the right idea, that it is someone whose life is in danger, then for me it was more if there was a refugee in their class, say in Secondary school, the way they would treat them.... However, I feel that a lot of it is so short term, with your memory as a child and how much impact a book has... I don’t know ... how much they would apply that to their own experience in the classroom in two years’ time.”*

This finds echoes in Naidoo’s own thesis (1992), discussed earlier, where working with texts challenging racism provided no evidence of attitudinal change and was almost impossible to quantify. Sophie had also been unhappy about the visit from the Refugee Week representative (discussed earlier) as she felt too much time had been devoted to defining “refugeeness”, which she had covered adequately already, and not enough to what “Simple Acts” (or social action) could be taken:

*“I thought they were coming in just to talk about Simple Acts and going through what the kids could be doing that week... I think it’s twenty things, ...for instance reading a book about exile. Well, we’ve all done that... Things like smiling at a refugee, having a cup of tea with a refugee, possibly playing football with a refugee, in which case you would have to know a local refugee... And they were invited to those Lewisham local events that were run by the people on the website. So we all wrote a blog entry that I posted off to Isabella. I don’t know if it will end up on their website.”*

I was critical of this visit as, in talking about acts that could be done to help refugees, and local events that could be attended explicitly for non-refugees to meet refugees, the speaker seemed to be “othering” refugees. The assumption that none of the children in the class were refugees themselves, appeared to be a surprising oversight for a representative of such an organisation.

## 8.5 Reflections

Jill Rutter, the respected writer about refugee education, said in her interview with me:

*“A lot of teaching that aims to make children think about refugee movement and migration, and also race more broadly is quite crude... And you have to kind of approach the attitudes that children have already...I think that “The Other Side of Truth” is much more effective in changing ... children’s attitudes because it enables teachers to look at exercises that build empathy and because it’s a much richer literature. You can get children to imagine what it would be like being those two Nigerian children in a much more roundabout and perhaps less crude way.”*

In this chapter I have evaluated how far dialogic teaching and critical literacy were used by teachers in mediating *The Other Side of Truth* in Year 5 classrooms. It seemed to me that both these teachers were interested in the main concepts of critical literacy (Lewison, et al., 2002) with many aspects being planned for via exciting and engaging activities. However, dialogic teaching (Alexander, 2008) was harder to achieve, with teachers clinging to traditional question-and-answer modes, asking for recall, and requiring expected responses, rather than more open questioning or discussion, and “chaining” of ideas (Skidmore, 2000). Nevertheless, purposeful classroom practice was definitely in evidence, with children being given opportunities to “read the world”, carry out activities with a real-life objectives, and take action on a small scale. Planning was creative and stimulating, with use of multi-modal digital technologies contributing to this, although teachers’ own experiences and contextual knowledge were not developed to the full as a resource.

The author visit was the richest experience in terms of critical pedagogy and dialogic possibilities, Naidoo being an instigator of “reading the word and the world” both through her books and in her persona. In focussing on socio-political issues, making connections and interrogating multiple viewpoints, the author and the teachers gave children an opportunity for critical literacy of

optimum quality. At the same time, the refugee experience was brought into the classroom in high profile, via the medium of good literature, whilst not constrained by curriculum objectives. Clearly the study of *The Other Side of Truth* for six weeks, which I observed, had been a treat for Year 5. If enthusiasm to read the sequel is proof of good engagement with a book, which it probably is, then Sophie had the perfect response:

*“All of the children at the end were desperate to read “Web of Lies” and one of them went to the library, and two of them have already started it. I said to them “Well I’ve only read half of it so I’m not giving you the book yet,” and they were saying “Oh come on read it quick, so we can have it!”*

## Chapter 9 – *The Other Side of Truth*: Children Making Meaning

### 9.1 Introduction

Like Chapter 7, this chapter again addresses my third research question:

- **How do refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to these texts?**

but this time looking at how children in the two Year 5 classes in School B responded to *The Other Side of Truth* when it was studied over the course of six weeks. Beverley Naidoo in her interview had suggested that:

*“If it’s a well told story, the child will then ask questions, and you are then in a position to say, well I wonder if that might not be the answer to that. What do you think? I thought that. What did you think about that? And you engage in a much more open ended way in exploring what is going on, than in a didactic way.”*

In order to engage with this kind of exploratory dialogue, much of the data for this chapter was gathered from small group discussions outside the classroom, during Week 4, 5 and 6 of studying the book. The composition of these groups is detailed in Appendix 6, along with the questions posed initially by me to stimulate discussion. The themes that were generated by the data fitted into similar overall headings as in Chapter 7, that is “text-to-self” and “text-to-world”, based on the work of Cochran-Smith (1984), and Keene and Zimmerman (1997), and the “constructed” nature of the text (connecting with a central tenet of critical literacy).

## 9.2 Text to self

### 9.2.1 Talking about own lives

From my discussions with Year 5 about *The Other Side of Truth* there was a powerful sense that several children were stimulated by the book to reflect on their own lives, or that of their parents and grandparents, many of whom were migrants and also refugees. Some of the examples below give a sense of the range and diversity of experience that the class contained, and how, for some, this linked with forced migration, violence, and dislocation as portrayed in the book. Some children talked about reasons why their parents had come to the UK which were not to do with extreme “push factors” of fleeing from war or persecution, but more to do with “pull factors” (Richmond, 1993), such as employment and educational opportunities, which would classify them as “economic migrants”, rather than refugees. Amisha was very specific on the details and motivations behind her parents’ story:

*“My mum and dad come from Bangladesh, but they come from different states. My mum and dad met in my country. They married each other and then they came to London for us, for the children to have a better future.”*

Dana was also clear in her recount of her own personal migration. Family break-up precipitated the move, but personal connection as well as the idea of a “better life” was the pull factor for her mother.

*“My mum, my dad and I... I was born in Romania... And we came here when I was seven and a half. We came because my mum and dad were divorced, ... my mum lost her job and we decided that we should come to London ... And now my mum stays with a friend, and then we just came here... not for a real specific reason, I don't think there was war or nothing. We just came for a better life, so my mum could get a job and I could get like...”*

Further on in the conversation she discloses that her education was also a motivator in the decision to come to the UK, school being seen as less formal and the system offering more opportunities than in Romania. Solange also spoke of “seeking a better life” but it soon became clear that the push factors of poverty and violence had been forceful as well:

*“My dad and my mum came from the same country in Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo. My dad came to seek for a better life because... that country’s the second poorest country in the world, so... poverty was really... killing people, so my dad came here as a refugee, and my mum came here as a refugee because her mother died when she was two ....They speak Lingala...”*

The Democratic Republic of Congo is notoriously violent and politically unstable, having seen shifts and changes in power which has precipitated forced migration for many decades. Solange noticeably used the word “refugee” about both her mother and father, and later was voluble about the fact that there should be no sense of shame associated with the term. In the discussion groups, children were happy to mention that their parents or grandparents had been refugees. For example Idil, whose ethnicity was described as Somali on the school database, but who had never been to Somalia, shared details of her grandmother’s migration experience:

*“When they had the first child they had to go back, because my grandma was not feeling well and cause they were having a war at that time, and then they had to bring my grandma all the way to London ... but my grandma couldn’t stay here, but she was a refugee here, but... the government finally said she could stay, and then she stayed.”*

Here she freely admits that war and refugee status were part of her family’s background story. Similarly, Dawo was happy to talk about her father’s experiences when arriving in Italy, a common first stop for Somali migrants, due to the colonisation of southern Somalia by Italy, in 1889. She made direct links between her father’s story and that of the children in *The Other Side of Truth*.

*“My dad, he was a bit like Sade and Femi, cause when he came to Italy he didn’t know how to speak Italian. He only knew how to speak English and Somalian, only a little bit of Somalian and English, for some reason. I don’t know why...and he had some friends that were living in Italy, and then he was looking for them, and then he couldn’t find them, so ...he was saving his pocket money in Somalia, and he had like £200 and then he went on the taxi and then do you know what happen? The taxi man only needed £40 – that’s a lot actually... And my dad gave him £100 cause he didn’t know... And then he had to keep moving houses, his cousin’s house one time and then his friend’s house...He went to lots of houses and then when he had £100, £50 left he gave it to this*

*old woman that would let him have his own bedroom in the house, to cook him food, every single day except from breakfast. My dad, he got breakfast from the café places, and then he found himself a home to stay in.”*

She gave me a level of detail that clearly derived from recounting of a personal experience, based closely on what her father had been prepared to share with her. Dawo engaged with issues of language barriers, unfamiliarity with currency and value, poverty and homelessness all within her short speech. Thomas told me that his parents had migrated from Uganda, but he was born in the UK. Although he maintained that his parents came originally “cause... there wasn’t enough money at that time when my mum and dad were there”, he talked from personal experience about aggression on the streets:

*“That’s how it is in my country. If they see anything there’s soldiers who walk everywhere to look at you.... If one person does something bad they shoot you...When I went to Uganda... when I was 7 or 8 ...That’s when I had to come back, cause there was a problem in Uganda where I was living... There was kind of a war or something... No, it wasn’t a big war, where you have to evacuate...It was just a little fight down there and there was guns and knives and we had to run away to England...”*

However, Thomas did not identify as from a refugee background, and, as we see later, intimated some hostility towards those who had claimed asylum.

From these disclosures it seemed that *The Other Side of Truth* had been a powerful catalyst for children to talk about their own and their parents’ backgrounds, and motivations for migrating. More than that, it generally opened up a discourse about “refugeeness” that children were then willing to engage in, particularly in a small group setting outside the classroom. Most responses here are from girls, who were more willing, and maybe more able, to talk about family circumstances, women and girls being traditionally the keepers of family history (Fiese, et al., 1995). Freire (Shor & Freire, 1987) stressed the importance of finding out about the background circumstances and lives of students as an essential prerequisite for his ‘dialogical method’ as

*“a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it”* (ibid, p. 98).

My questions (shown in Appendix 6) had been a starting point in this reflective process. Nevertheless it is not easy to make the space and time for this kind of interaction during the primary school day, and teachers may be frustrated by the lack of opportunity, as already mentioned.

### **9.2.2 Considering the refugee perspective**

As already shown, my discussion groups, class observations, and interviews with teachers, had not revealed any children identifying as refugee, although they were happy to talk about their parents and grandparents in such terms. Neither did they address the “message” from the point of view of a refugee reader. Asking children about a hypothetical situation in their class was therefore the only way I could garner opinion on such perspectives. This was important, as reservations about the reaction of refugees are constantly presented in the case against using such potentially disturbing books in the classroom. I therefore asked whether discussion groups thought this book would present difficulties if there was a refugee child in the class. Abdi and Moussa both said they thought it would, Abdi actually relating it to himself:

*Abdi: “Cause this sort of stuff has happened to me, and I wouldn’t like to talk about it that much.... Cause it reminds me of all the bad stuff that has happened.”*

*Moussa: “If that happened to me, that my dad died, it would have reminded me and I wouldn’t like it.”*

Similarly Solange referred to the potential for a refugee child in the class to shrink from the spotlight, and Amisha returned to the theme of stimulating difficult memories:

*Solange: “Yes, it would. Cause it would be really tough to, like, take in the book. She would feel exposed, in a way.”*

*Amisha: “Yes, because if they’re hearing the story it will make them remember what happened to them.”*

In contrast Olu and Kye had differing opinions, but felt confident to voice them as they saw that in discussion groups multiple viewpoints were allowed and respected:

*Olu: "I don't think so... Because the book is about a refugee and if a child in our class is a refugee I think they would understand properly what is happening."*

*Kye: "I think 'yes' because they might have just reminded them that they were in the situation and then it would make them feel different from other people."*

Amechi demonstrated a sophisticated ambivalence to the question, and approached the answer from both angles (although using 'yes' and 'no' the opposite way round). It was also noticeable that after all the work and discussion around the book, she still hesitated before using the word "refugee":

*"I'd say 'yes' and 'no'. 'No', because the (hesitation) refugee, the person might not really like people to read it and start feeling sorry for her, and ... 'Yes' because her or him would like... well when they're reading the book they feel like they can say stuff more openly to their friends and people around them, cause people will understand after reading the book."*

Dana talked about the stigma associated with "refugeeness" which we have discussed before, but also a possible resistance to being labelled. As Zetter (1991) points out, being a refugee is only a bureaucratic entity.

*"It would be a little bit difficult, and then I'm thinking of what happened to them maybe. They will feel a little bit ashamed because it will be like "Oh! You're a refugee! How was it?" ...And they were like thinking "I don't want to be called a refugee. I'm a person. It's not like I'm a different human. I'm still a human, but I'm just a refugee." And then, like, they won't really like it."*

Here the children demonstrate reflection and analysis, raising issues that teachers need to be aware of when introducing a text such as *The Other Side of Truth* in the primary classroom, especially in regards to refugee children in the class, broached in Chapter 6. It can be seen that opinions differed on

whether the book would present difficulties for a refugee child in the class, and this was to be expected, as it is debated by student teachers, and teachers themselves, in my experience. I would suggest that there is no “right answer” to the question, and that each child’s situation needs to be taken into account, rather than making generalised statements. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, knowing the details of everyone’s circumstances in the class is not easily achieved. What was useful was the debate that was engendered by this question, with children feeling able to offer differing points of view, both from each other, and within their own response. Here we see good “dialogic engagement” in practice (Aukerman, 2012).

### **9.2.3 Suitability of the text**

I also asked discussion groups whether they thought the teacher should not read the book to the class, if a refugee child would be upset by it. Abdi, Moussa, Kye and Thomas thought that it would be better not to. As Thomas put it:

*“Cause, every time, if you read a book and a refugee is in the school... that means they might think, the refugee person might think... might be embarrassed... that even he’s a refugee.”*

Olu again took a different approach and answered from conflicting viewpoints, which impressed me, as his English language skills were not particularly strong:

*“I’ve got ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Because ‘yes’ ... it’s a good book and maybe there’s a refugee in our class and he might see this book as more interesting and be happier, or ‘no’, they shouldn’t because that will make the child, the refugee child angrier.”*

Again, as Arizpe and Styles (2003) observed in their study, the girls were more eloquent than the boys, and spoke at length on the issue, generally being in favour of reading the book to the class, putting forward the argument that it was “for the greater good” as Dana explained:

*“Yes... she should read it to us because... just because one person’s a refugee, then it can’t ... if it affects them, it can’t really affect all our*

*learning, because it kind of depends... To them it could be good because, for example, if we have to write something about how you feel... how would you feel being a refugee? they will really put all their effort inside then because they know how you've been through it. Like not just stop everything for one person."*

With "dialogic engagement" the groups put forward differing perspectives, discussed points of view amongst themselves, and even changed their minds as a result of the ethos created, where they felt able to take risks while offering opinions, and demonstrate divergent thinking. The exchange below, given in full, shows this in action, beginning with the girls offering practical examples of how problems could be overcome:

*Solange: "In a way, yes, the teacher ... may if, ...because most of the children already are excited to hear the book, maybe the refugee child could be taken out and do a private session, or something, to read another book, or the teacher, or assistant teacher, TA could be, like, reading with them, cause that's how some teachers do that at certain points of time."*

*Amisha: "Um, they should... the teacher should read another book and keep that book, and then in the spare time, when the child isn't here, they could read it."*

*Dawo: "Also, the teacher shouldn't read it, because there might be another class with a big mouth, and when its playtime and they're playing with the refugee child, whatever the name is, they might tell him and then he might remember and then he might cry, and then he might get bullied, just like Sade."*

*Solange: "Miss, Miss, I just changed my mind. I think it is good because it will open their eyes more, not to be afraid because you are a refugee. It doesn't matter, or you can't go back in the past and change everything – you are a refugee. You can't judge someone, you are refugee. It doesn't matter, just live your life."*

*Amisha: "They should get that experience."*

*Dawo: "I think the teacher should read it now. I've changed my mind again."*

*Amisha: "The teacher should read it."*

As already stated, Beverley Naidoo is herself a fierce spokesperson for the engagement of children with controversial and socio-political issues, even if it

challenges some in the class to deal with their own histories and experiences. It occurred to me that she would be pleased to hear this exchange in defence of her book, by children with Bangladeshi, Congolese and Somali backgrounds. During Naidoo's visit to Year 5 I also recorded in my field notes:

*"She talks about the potential problem for refugee children dealing with the emotional side of the books."*

Her argument was that far worse than talking about the refugee experience, is making it a taboo area, that a refugee child might be ashamed of and other children unable to have access to, which echoes the previous discussion well.

#### **9.2.4 Nigeria in the spotlight**

Three children in my discussion groups had themselves migrated from Nigeria, and I wondered how they would relate to the characters, and view the depiction of their country in *The Other Side of Truth*. Amechi and Ade, both from Nigeria, made direct connections with the location and the experiences in the book and were keen to share this commonality. Amechi told me that her father had left the family and returned to Nigeria. However Ade, who had disclosed to Beverley Naidoo during her visit that she had been in a refugee camp for a short time when she was five, did not open up about her experience either in class or in the discussion group with only Amechi and me present. My field notes about the discussion record:

*"Ade doesn't confess to being a refugee or talk about being in a refugee camp."*

*Amechi becomes sad half way through the interview. Misses her dad?"*

In retrospect my own terminology here is interesting – that talking about being a refugee amounts to a "confession". Despite a clear push factor of violence, Ade seemed unclear of the circumstances and only alluded to her experience mysteriously:

*Amechi: "Because we are both Nigerian, we know....we come from very close to where they came from so we know what it would be like..."*

*Ade: "So we know what it would feel like for them, cause of everything they've been going through, it's like what I've been through with my family... Well, it's like we had to leave, cause they nearly killed my mum, because some people didn't like her....and..."*

*JH: "Really? Who was that? Do you know?"*

*Ade: "No. My mum never told me. She always says that she doesn't want me to make the same mistakes that she did... We came here and we became safe. And like, when I was two we went back to Nigeria and everything was ok and then we came back here and then it's like nothing ever happened, and something did happen, and some people still don't put their past behind them."*

The last sentence of this extract suggests that Ade knew far more of the circumstances she was alluding to than she was prepared to discuss. Also of interest is that Amechi became visibly sad during the discussion, which I attributed to her missing her father. An important point to be considered here is that children who are not refugees can also be affected by the subject matter of the book, as it could touch their lives in many ways. As discussed in Chapter 1, the duality of "mirrors" and "windows" is misleading, links between *The Other Side of Truth* and children's lives being far more nuanced than this. Nevertheless, reading the book in class had clearly had a powerful effect on Ade, and had seemingly disturbed her with its closeness in the location and experience to her own.

*"I can still remember it cause it's like vivid in my head, cause whenever I go to bed, um, I've read the book at school, um, it makes me have dreams at night about what... about my journey here and Nigeria... sometimes I picture that like something's going to happen, and then it's like one minute it feels like it's going to happen and then next nothing does..."*

The text had made Ade re-live some of her journey to safety and her memories of Nigeria, which could have been seen at best as undesirable, and at worst, as traumatic. The "affective" side of the reading transaction, in Rosenblatt's terms, is clear here, and also raises questions about the responsibilities of teachers, who may engender these feelings, through class reading, but not offer opportunities for children to talk about or deal with them.

Pertinent here is the idea of “bibliotherapy” (Crothers, 1916) (Shrodes, 1950), discussed in Chapter 5 and seen as including identification, catharsis, and insight. Later in the discussion she stated that the book had had a positive effect as well, in provoking pleasant memories of her childhood in Nigeria. It could be seen from this that some catharsis might have occurred, showing the dual effect that reading can stimulate.

*“It kind of makes me feel like I’m back in Nigeria, cause when I was one, my mum used to take me to this park and I used to have so much fun there and then the picture, it just makes the memories come all back to me.”*

Olu, who from his accent seemed more recently arrived from Nigeria than the two girls, told me that his parents spoke Yoruba at home, and had memories of using the Nigerian currency, Naira, through which he displayed obvious pride in his nationality. He did not seem to be negatively affected by the image of Nigeria in the book, but rather more empowered by the cultural relevance of the story to him personally, as my notes suggest:

*“Olu in the class gets a thumbs up from boy sitting opposite. He mimes a gun with his hands. Is this a gesture of triumph?”*

Later on my notes hint that not enough is made of Olu’s ethnic, linguistic and cultural connection with the book, which I felt might have had an impact on his academic competence. This could have helped him to feel proud of himself, thus raising his self-esteem and his position among his peers, which is always helpful to migrant children. In a small group Olu was happy to talk about his Nigerian origin, and again engaged with discussion about the currency. He also spoke with insight about corruption, bribery and violence in Nigeria, which is tackled vividly in the book.

*“Yes, there are some soldiers that if they want to go in cars, if they want to go to the shop, they hand over 1,000 Naira to them to go to the shop and there’s soldiers stopped them, and they take the 1,000 pounds... 1,000 Naira but they can’t go back. They can’t go back because they block the way...”*

Whether he was talking from personal knowledge was unclear, but he did not hold back from endorsing this picture of the country, almost relishing the different, and sometimes aggressive, aspects of life there. As seen in Chapter 8, raising issues of corruption can be challenging to the teacher, and needs to be carefully handled in class discussions.

### **9.3 Text to world**

#### **9.3.1 Attitudes to migration and seeking asylum**

Negative attitudes arose in Year 5, School B, when I asked a group of three boys what they had learned from the book. The following discussion took place between Thomas from Uganda, Kye, who has a Caribbean background, and Olu, who arrived from Nigeria in 2005:

*Thomas: "That some people can get past with fake passports."*

*JH: "Yeah, right, they can, can't they? And if they are really desperate, that's what people do, isn't it? Yeah. Do you think it's right to do that?"*

*All: "No."*

*JH: "No. Not ever?"*

*Thomas: "They try to trick people..."*

Despite the fact that Thomas' own family may have come to the UK as asylum seekers, his negative attitude towards refugees generally spilled out when he considered that Olu might himself be a refugee and challenges him:

*Thomas: "You were a refugee?"*

*Olu: "No refugees here."*

*Thomas: "Were you one?"*

*Olu: "No. Never. (laughs) My grandma was. My grandma was."*

Olu's repeated denial displays an unwillingness to identify as a refugee, which was noticeable generally throughout the class. However, as seen, children were able to acknowledge that their parents or grandparents had been

refugees. It seems that this amount of distance was allowable in their eyes. Dana, from Romania, displayed great sensitivity to the situation of refugees and migrants in general, probably due to the fact that she had arrived in the UK only a few years previously:

*“It could happen to anybody... pretend there’s a big war in the whole of London, people would have to go to another country. Let’s say I need to go to Greece, and then they’ll be like “Excuse me, you’re a refugee!” and then I’ll be, like, “I am from Romania, from London, now I came here. How am I a refugee?” and they’ll be like “you’re a refugee cause you’re from another country,” and really that could happen to anybody... If other people need safety or something, they could go to their countries and it’s not like “you’re not allowed to come here,” but “Scuse me, I’m not safe in my country. I’ve got to go somewhere. I wouldn’t be living on the street.” They should accept everybody here because really from your country you don’t come for good to work in another country. If you have money, if you have anything you want, you won’t come, but really, if there’s a problem, that’s when it’s hard to decide. That’s when you come.”*

Her point that “it could happen to anybody”, chimes with Rutter’s aforementioned quote that “refugees are ordinary people, who had to go through extraordinary experiences” (1991, p. 4). Her manner of dramatizing the situation in simple speech demonstrates that she understands the issues at stake even though she might not have the vocabulary to present it in more analytical language.

During the course of one discussion group, I asked the four girls concerned directly “*Do you think there are any refugee children in your class?*” The ensuing conversation, mainly with Solange, suggested attitudes that refugee children might have themselves about issues of migration, not something that I was able to glean directly, as mentioned above.

*Solange: “Yes, and I think I know one. One of my friends, I’m not going to say who. She said that she was from a country near Sierra Leone. She was born there. She came here...Don’t tell anyone. She told me she wasn’t but I’m thinking she is because she was born in Sierra Leone.”*

*JH: “So do you think children are embarrassed to say that they are refugees?”*

*Solange: "No, it's not embarrassing, because she came from that place and came to another place because of the conditions... Some people are rude so they shouldn't know the word refugee and use it in the wrong way, cause when they know it, that's when they take advantage of it, and it's like being rude to children who are refugees..."*

*JH: "Mm. So you don't think reading this book would help people..."*

*Dawo: "It would make them know about refugees and it would teach them not to bully people, or threaten people..."*

*Solange: "In the classroom, yeah, I'm not a shy person. I would actually say ... "I am refugee. I came from another country because of the way it was.... People were getting killed, and there were bad things, and that's why I came here."*

Solange had previously mentioned that her parents were refugees, so is not far from the experience herself. In this exchange she gives us an intriguing view of how "rude" children, on learning the word "refugee" might take advantage of its negative connotations and "use it in the wrong way", and how she might deal with the stigma herself, by talking about her situation and defending it. The exchange demonstrates the importance of small group discussion so that children can develop ideas, moving from shame to pride, as Solange does here. What also emerges from this excerpt is the weight that one word can carry, the term "refugee" in particular being "ideologically saturated," (Bakhtin, 1934, p. 271), but also with the possibility of multiple codes or "heteroglossia" (ibid), depending on viewpoint.

Dawo also contributes that reading *The Other Side of Truth* might be useful in changing attitudes to refugees. However, in her interview, Jill Rutter was sceptical about how effective one book can be in challenging negative perceptions, but still felt that fiction was an appropriate starting point, especially for the younger age group:

*"I think you need to understand the limitations of changing attitudes, and that one story in a term is probably not going to have a huge impact. I think drama, literature and the arts are more effective in unpicking attitudes to newcomers than perhaps the social sciences where you're imparting facts, but also facts that can't be easily assimilated... Because your prime obligation isn't to impart knowledge or impart Geographical skills. It's to perhaps explore the context and*

*structure of the writing. I mean that enables you to look perhaps in a more creative way and perhaps go deeper into the issues...*

### **9.3.2 Defining the term “refugee”**

Judging by the discussion groups held during the last three weeks of studying *The Other Side of Truth* many children had a clear idea of what the refugee experience entailed, although not necessarily a concise definition to work with. Amisha, a deeply empathetic girl, who had soaked up the book and was reading the sequel, displayed a high level of understanding when asked.

*“I think refugee means when somebody or someone, their home is lost, or something very terrible has happened to them, they really have to come here or the same thing will happen to them.”*

This ‘hypothetical modality’ of talk (Barnes & Todd, 1995) as in her opening “I think...” kept the space open for dialogue between speakers, allowing for the extension of ideas as suggested by Mercer’s (2000) ‘exploratory talk’. As Maine (2013) points out:

*“Their ideas were suggestions and therefore up for debate, offering the possibility of further exploration or connection to their existing world” (ibid, p. 154).*

This is demonstrated by Solange’s attempt to clarify the explanation further:

*“So basically what she said is that when you are a refugee means that something has happened in your home place and then you have to evacuate or leave from your country.”*

When I tried to add more depth to the definition with “A refugee is someone who has had to go to another country because in their own country they’ve been persecuted”, Dawo asked “What’s persecuted? I know executed, but not persecuted.” I expressed my own contributions tentatively, as in “pupil framed” discourse (John, 2009, p. 127), feeling that an explanation of the meaning of “persecution” was important for an understanding of the refugee situation, and something that Year 5 might be able to engage with.

### 9.3.3 Understanding the refugee experience

Generally children engaged in discussion groups displayed an excellent understanding of the nature of the refugee experience, developed during the reading of *The Other Side of Truth*, although not necessarily its definition. They were clear on all three aspects of “refugeeness”, as detailed by Hamilton and Moore (2004) encompassing pre-, trans-, and post- migration ecologies. Kye, from a Caribbean background, focussed mainly on the shooting and killing that precipitated the flight of the two children in the book, and the possible danger they would face by staying (the pre-migration ecology).

*“Your parents might not want you to die and they might send you to another country so you can stay there.... Because some people were trying to kill her dad so... they accidentally killed the mum. They might accidentally kill Femi or Sade... They were trying to see, if they would first shoot the mum and then if Papa wouldn't change his mind, they would shoot another person until he changes his mind.”*

Most children agreed that the highly dramatic opening had affected all of them greatly. However questions as to how the teacher should deal with frightening aspects of a text are unresolved here.

*Dana: “When I heard the mum got shot I was just like in a shock. How could that happen?... Usually story openings go, “there was once”.... “and he lived happily”..... and then ...not... “boom, boom... she got shot!”*

*Kye: “Every same bit when the mum died. I do not like that bit.”*

*Olu: (referring to the blood) “All over her nice dress.”*

Mariam's Story, a tale-within-a-tale device, is presented by Naidoo to give another refugee's account, other than that of Sade and Femi, as relatively wealthy but unaccompanied asylum seekers from Nigeria. Mariam is a Somali girl who Sade befriends eventually, and who tells her of her reason for leaving and the journey on foot with her family (the pre- and trans-migration ecology). Two Somali boys, Abdi and Moussa, had made real connections with this story and had just written their own retelling of it.

*Moussa: "And Mariam was just the girl that her dad died for feeding rebels and they had to walk all the way from Hargeisa to...to...to ... Kenya and they got a letter from their dad..."*

*Abdi: "Their dad. The dad's brother..."*

*Moussa: "Their uncle, and they said, bad news is their dad died. But they had... they wanted to come to London to stay with their uncle, but the brother said he will go back, but they didn't heard from him ever again."*

*Abdi: "They never heard from him."*

*Moussa: "They had to walk ...15 days..."*

*Abdi: "No. It took them a long time. They went on a boat...It was 15 days."*

*Moussa: "It was very crowded."*

*JH: "Um, yes. That was from Somalia, wasn't it?"*

*Abdi: "Yes, and their feet were swollen. They didn't have shoes on."*

The manner in which they interrupt each other and "chain" (Skidmore, 2000) their responses displays identification with the subject matter that leads to a very graphic description, with minimal input from me. Their empathy with the family is striking as they describe in detail the gruelling journey undertaken. They also demonstrate an understanding of how refugee experiences intersect with the ordinary events in people's lives:

*Moussa: "The sad part was it was on her birthday that her dad got taken away."*

*Abdi: "And birthdays are supposed to be happy days."*

Maine and Waller (2011) argue that "feelings of empathy do more than assist readers in comprehending the text; they act as a tool of engagement" (ibid, p.

364) and here we can see this ‘deepening’ of the dialogic space between text and reader.

All three boys in another group recalled with relish the journey Sade and Femi had undergone, using fake passports and being smuggled out of the country, especially brushes with customs, passport officers and the police. Again the manner in which they interrupt each other displays an eagerness in retelling aspects of the story, seemingly appealing to their sense of adventure, and possibly resonated with films, TV programmes or video games they may have seen or played.

*Olu: “...when Uncle Tunde shouted to go and Mr Bankole and Mrs Bankole, treat them really badly and called them different names... She went to a plane. She got out... And the Passport Officer kept looking at the passport, and Sade called him “Googly Eyes” or something else.”*

*Kye: “She calls him “Cool Gaze”.”*

*All three boys: “Miss Police Business”*

*Olu: “Yeah and they got searched for drugs.”*

*Kye: “They got searched. They did a crime... the police think it was them that did the crime and it wasn’t them. Some teenagers broke into a shop and they were next to it...”*

*Olu: “The police office got mostly about the money.”*

*Kye: “And I like the part when Mrs Bankole put the money inside the suitcase and they bribed the police officer who got the money ...”*

This extract demonstrates a process of joint discovery and “a commitment to the principles of collectivism rather than individualism” (Bignall, 2012, p. 53). Such discourse is not easily achieved, but open- ended discussion and the exchange of ideas are crucial if children are to respond aesthetically to literature (Nystrand, 2006).

As the two Year 5 classes read through the book, their understanding of the problems which asylum seekers face on arrival in the host country, and the process for claiming sanctuary deepened, all part of the post-migration ecology. What stood out most in Idil’s mind was when the abandoned children

first had to fend for themselves in London, a frightening scenario, but also perhaps giving a sense of adventure.

*“I think when they got on the bus and they didn’t know what to do. They didn’t know the buses or anything.”*

For Dana, it was more the discovery that the children’s uncle, the only person they knew in London was not there, which is indeed a traumatic point in the text.

*“Well the bit that really stands out to me is when they went to the college and didn’t find Uncle Dele cause they were expecting a hand to help them when they got to London, but being nowhere, knowing that your closest person trying to help you is not there, just stands out.”*

Solange displayed a more sophisticated approach, both through her vocabulary and manipulation of language as well as her ability to summarise and analyse a situation:

*“I think what was really frightening is the way that they want to have a good life here in London, but like there are so many barriers, like the bullies at school and they can’t tell the bullies or Auntie Gracie and Uncle Roy their real names to help them like find their family back home.”*

The book had many significant moments which had affected the children, and interestingly the spread of these reflected all aspects of the refugee experience, from pre-migration catalyst, to trans-migration stressors, and on to post-migration nightmares (quite literally in Sade’s case), see Hamilton and Moore, 2004. When watching an improvised drama sketch where children acted out an interview with immigration officials in small groups, I recorded:

*“Children’s answers demonstrate clear understanding of the reasons why the family are claiming asylum. Into role as different characters. Able to see it from different perspectives. Some of the questions are probing and very directly to the point – e.g. “Why do you have the right to stay here?””*

Drama often functions well in providing the opportunity to “interrogate multiple viewpoints” (Lewison, et al., 2002). Furthermore this activity “disrupts the commonplace”, and engages with “socio-political issues” (ibid), dealing with difficult questions of legality and obligation with regards to asylum seekers. Here the book reflects the underlying “climate of belief” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 37) of the society in which it is a part, “opposition” to contemporary discourse on asylum being systematically silenced as Kushner (2003, p. 26) asserts. Through the text and the surrounding activities aimed at developing their response, such as this drama activity, children had an emergent perception of the specifics of the refugee experience in its entirety. The efficacy of “drawing on personal testimony and asking ‘how would you feel if...’ questions” (Rutter, 2006, p. 9), in contrast to the limited potential of statistics and hard facts, had borne fruit in this class, through the reading and follow-up activities.

### **9.3.4 Addressing other issues**

When asked what they had learnt from reading the book, children made explicit links to bullying and racism, encompassing problems that refugees regularly face when arriving in a new country. This is covered fulsomely in the book and is the source of much dramatic tension. Kye wanted to discuss what he had learnt from the Childline website. He was keen to link this to his own knowledge and understanding of the effects of bullying.

*“...that you get bullied, and that you get bullied so badly that you might die... They can’t run away but they commit suicide. We was talking about Childline... One of my brother’s friends... he died because people were teasing him, and so someone stabbed him at the end. And then there was my cousin’s cousin... people were stretching her and calling her names and her heart actually stopped... it was tightened, because she was so mad. She had to go hospital. She’s still alive. She’s 16 now.”*

In the same group, Olu and Thomas wanted to follow this by instances in the book where Sade is bullied, and link this explicitly to racism.

*Olu: “Ya, people in Sade class they think her name is wrong. They spell it like S H A Y D A Y but actually her name is S A D E.”*

*Thomas: "They say she's called..."*

*Olu: " "Shadayaday"..."*

*Thomas: "Yes. "Shadayaday." They are being racist to her."*

For Moussa and Abdi it was the bullying and racism at school that was top most in their minds, perhaps because they had just focussed on this part of the book before the discussion groups took place. As Moussa, a second-generation Somali himself pointed out:

*"They call her "Africa girl" for no reason, and plus they said that she came from a bush from Africa."*

Moussa and Abdi also made connections with racism in their own lives:

*Moussa: "One time I was at this park and two boys came up to me and they said I'm a Paki..."*

*Abdi: "My mum has been racially abused...."*

Idil and Dana felt that the book contained a "do-as-you-would-be-done-by" message, and they wanted to use this to formulate a blueprint for the future:

*Idil: "Never let someone boss you around, cause what happened to Sade? ... So, um, never boss someone around."*

*Dana: "... don't make yourself be unhappy, just to make other people happy. You need to stand up for yourself and say that "No! I am not doing this. I am bossing myself around, not you, not nobody"."*

Finally, Dawo and Solange felt that they had gained important understanding about Nigeria, or Africa in general, and linked this to themes of war, racism, differential living standards, and language usage, all important issues in their own right.

*Dawo: "I learnt that in Nigeria, in Africa, actually, there's a lot of wars and if white people go to Africa, they'll start being racist."*

*Solange: "Not all of them. Not all of them. Some of them.... I've learnt that in Nigeria it seems really nice and some parts people may not have*

*the riches that others have, not everyone has the same riches as each other, but some people live at high standards, and others quite low.”*

*Dawo: “I learnt that, if you’re from Africa, doesn’t mean that you can’t speak English.”*

Freire (Freire & Macedo, 1987) asserts that “reading ...is preceded by and intertwined with knowledge of the world” (ibid, p. 29). In this way he highlights that students do not just learn from the text, but they bring their prior understanding of the world to the text. Thus children in Year 5 brought their preconceived ideas to the book, and through “collaborative” discourse, where “pupils are engaged in a form of joint construction of meaning with their teacher” (John, 2009, p. 128), an atmosphere was created in which children felt confident to contribute their own ideas.

## **9.4 The “constructedness” of the text**

### **9.4.1 Engaging with the author**

As outlined in Chapter 8, Beverley Naidoo visited School B during the research period, giving an assembly to both Year 5 classes about her writing, and joining them in their classrooms for a more intimate question-and-answer sessions afterwards. This experience gave children a perfect chance to interrogate the “constructedness” of the text in action, finding out about the author’s personal story and her underlying “climate of belief” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 37), her motive in writing, and the research undertaken leading up to the production of the book as a selection from my field notes demonstrate:

*Ch: “How did you feel when you first came to this country?”*

*BN: “Very much like Sade, my head was in one place, but my body was in another.”*

*Ch: “Did you feel emotions when you wrote the book?”*

*BN: “Yes, I cried at some parts” (in very emotional voice!)*

*Ch: “Is it a true book?”*

*BN: “The things that happened really could happen.”*

*Ch: "Do you write from your own experience?"*

*BN: "No. I have had similar experiences, but I also have many friends with similar experiences. I also read a lot and find out that way about other people's lives."*

After the visit, children wrote a newspaper article for the school journal about the visit, the best being chosen for actual publication in the weekly newsletter, see Figure 24.

**A Visit from a Captivating Spirit**

**Famous children's novelist, Beverley Naidoo, made the effort to travel over 100 miles to meet Year 5 at (School A) When she arrived half of Year 5 crowded around her, asking about her brilliant books. The visit took place in the Main Hall on Friday 25th May and even her husband joined us. Year 5 have been reading one of her most popular books, "The Other Side of Truth" and some children have read another of her texts, "Out of Bounds" during guided reading.**

**Beverley grew up in South Africa, but her time there was short. Due to her fight against racism, during the apartheid, England became her home, where she lived in exile. Her writing is extraordinary and has opened people's eyes and hearts for years. The saying, 'One person can change the world' is true.**

**I think she is a truly wonderful woman.**

**Figure 24: Winning article about Naidoo's visit for the school newsletter**

This piece pays tribute to Naidoo, through meeting her and finding out about her life, but also refers to the power of literature as a transformative force via "efferent" and "aesthetic" means ("people's eyes and hearts"), and the potential of the author to effect change through their writing. We can see that Year 5's engagement with the writer was more complex than the younger children's responses (see Chapter 7), perhaps because of their age, the teachers' approach, or because Naidoo visited the school in person, spending much more time in explaining the "backstory" to the text, or perhaps it was a combination of all three. The value of an author's visit became clearer to me,

as I witnessed the effect this meeting had on all the children; the excitement, the dialogic potential, and the critical engagement could not be underestimated.

#### **9.4.2 Discussing the “message”**

As we have seen previously Naidoo invites children to question what is taken for granted or commonplace, and engage with socio-political issues in the world around, through the medium of literature. Although she resists the idea that her writing has a “message”, children appeared to relish the opportunity to discuss in my small groups, after Naidoo’s visit, why she had written *The Other Side of Truth*. Maine (2013) considers that rather than a single transaction between text and reader, as described by Rosenblatt (1978), there needs to be conversations between readers as they co-construct meaning from text offering depth to the reading experience. This process had started in the classroom, and in discussion groups children responded with a variety of perspectives, exploring the significance of the text, and demonstrating their awareness that multiple interpretations and responses are possible “and more valuable as such” (Maine, 2013, p. 155).

Some children felt that the message of the book was simply expository:

*Abdi: “To show everyone how it feels to be a refugee...It shows you about real life ... Cause some people might want to come to this country for a reason, but they haven’t got passports and stuff.”*

*Moussa: “Mariam and Sade and Femi are like the same, cause they’re both refugees. They came from their country for a reason.”*

Amisha linked understanding of the refugee experience with a plea for action, embracing kindness and tolerance, and an exhortation against bullying:

*“She wrote these books so when people read it, they will understand why refugees come here, and to be more kind to them, and if they are a bully, whoever reads the book will learn the lesson not to bully.”*

Again Solange saw the message as a moral cautionary tale, appealing for tolerance and understanding:

*“I think she wrote the book because you know the way people say “don’t judge a book by its cover”...? You could use it as a metaphor, like “don’t judge people for the way they are.” ... You never know what’s happened to them and they might be in a terrible state, maybe they just lost someone, and they’ve had to become a refugee to be safe, like Sade and Femi, so it’s not good to judge people and be rude to them.”*

Dana brought the message back to her previous theme, that the refugee experience is not exclusive to children in other parts of the world, but could happen to any of us at any time.

*“Well, I think she wrote this book because the experience of what happens with children, it could happen to anyone. It could happen to anyone, like their parents got shot. Let’s hope that wouldn’t happen, but that could happen and it could even be that you’re getting bullied or have to have foster parents, all of that story can be based on life. Anything could happen to anybody, those kind of things.”*

However Amechi broadened the stage to muse on the role of literature in general to open up pathways previously unexplored. She focussed on the importance of children being aware of the world around them from an early age, and that school might play a role in developing this, over and above that allowed in the home.

*“I think she wrote it to make sure all the other world knows what happens in other countries, for instance, parents might keep these things away from children, but when children grow up and they still don’t know it, it can come as a really big shock to them, when they find out.”*

Meanwhile, Idil also offered an interesting perspective, wondering if the subject matter was indeed suitable for children, a viewpoint she raises herself, not in response to any questioning. This was been raised in Chapter 6 with reference to *The Colour of Home*, but not in the context of *The Other Side of Truth* until this point.

*“But this story is a bit... it’s not like a kids’ story, cause they could be scared.”*

Kundnani (2001) calls for “initiatives in schools to explain to young people from where and why refugees come” (ibid, p. 59) while pulling apart prevailing discourse. What is interesting is that all children saw the message in terms of a “window” onto the refugee situation, or even a “sliding glass door” (Bishop, 1990) through which to experience it vicariously. No one saw it as a “mirror” to hold up and see themselves and their own lives, in order to gain comfort and reassurance. Despite both authors’ insistence that such books have a dual function (see Chapter 5) it seems that the “implied reader” (Iser, 1976, first published in English in 1978) is still a non-refugee, even though the “actual reader” may be otherwise.

## **9.5 Reflections**

This chapter considers how children read, understood and responded to *The Other Side of Truth* in Year 5. It proved impossible to divide the response of refugee children from non-refugees, partly because so many children in School B had migratory histories, but also because of the unwillingness of any children to disclose themselves as refugees. Interestingly, they were happy to talk about their parents and grandparents in such terms, and used the text as a catalyst to talk about their own and their families’ history of migration, sometimes with emotional intensity. However, respondents only considered the non-refugee reader, to the point that I had to construct a hypothetical refugee to find out how children thought the book might be received by them. Differing viewpoints were put forward on this question, with groups debating back and forth, playing ideas off each other, and changing their minds.

However, children displayed a good understanding of the refugee experience in its entirety, including encompassing surrounding issues such as racism, bullying, fostering, and continuing uncertainty, which are often lingering legacies of seeking asylum. Some children displayed existing prejudices

about issues of sanctuary, but others demonstrated solidarity, and also sensitivity about the stigma attached to the refugee status which made disclosure difficult. Through discussion of the book's "message" there were some strategies outlined for positive action in welcoming refugees,

*"creating a situation where our students can see the need for action and envision themselves as actors"* (Bickford, 2008, p. 142).

Children were keen to talk to me about the story in discussion groups, different as it was to the usual IRF question-and-answer exchanges that happen in the classroom, where children are frequently asked to recall the story to date, or to justify a position based on evidence from the text. Here we could depart from this formulaic pedagogical format, partly because of the small number of children in the discussion who could really debate and have their voices heard (an unusual event, despite it being a cornerstone of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Unicef, 1989), (James, 2007)). I was genuinely interested in their opinions, rather than merely testing their memory and comprehension, or their ability to formulate an argument and defend it. In "collaborative" discourse I was able to use a process called "uptake" (Collins, 1982), exploring children's own line of interest, and supporting student ideas by incorporating their responses into subsequent questions. Meeting Beverley Naidoo had been highly significant in appreciating the "constructedness" of the text, in terms of finding out about the author's own personal history, and having the opportunity to ask direct questions of an adult, something that children are not often able to do. In the absence of this, Myhill (2007) suggests an activity called "Questioning the Author" (ibid, p.62), where children devise a series of questions they would ask the author, were they to have the chance, which would build on critical literacy skills to focus on the "why?" and "how?" choices that have been made in creating the text as an artefact.

In the Year 5 discussion groups children also enjoyed questioning me, capitalising on the informal nature of our conversations to ask about my

relationship and opinion of the author: “How did you meet Beverley Naidoo?”, and “Are you a fan of the author, by the way? Do you read her books?” As has been highlighted earlier, children very rarely have the opportunity to ask questions of adults to find out what they really think, and even less often are given a proper answer. Furthermore I was able to offer my own opinion, and acknowledge it as equally partial, whereas the teacher does not usually explicitly give his or her point of view, but aims as if by stealth, to steer children to their agenda. Carey-Webb (1996) reminds us of the need for teachers “to meet their students where they live” (ibid, p. 16), a laudable aim, but very hard to achieve with class management demands such as they are. Teachers can plan and teach high quality lessons, but what they lack is teacher time to really find out how their pupils have received a book. This key ingredient is vital to the pedagogical process, and we must seek ways that this can be achieved, as it is generally missing in the contemporary classroom. What I discovered was how little opportunity teachers had to experience the pleasure of literary discussion with their pupils, and how much the children enjoyed it.

## Chapter 10 – Concluding Discussion

### 10.1 Introduction

This chapter will weave together the threads emerging from the study of *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* in the primary classroom, to identify patterns emerging from the data at various levels, in order to answer my overall research question:

**What role can children’s literature play in understanding and validating the refugee experience?**

Through a vertical approach, I have examined whether authors’ intentions are realised in the classroom reading experience, while also appreciating that when sharing books with the primary age group, the teacher is a powerful agent in the process. A further set of questions broke down the first one into targeted areas of focus, and followed an author/teacher/child trajectory as below:

- **What are the motivations of authors who write about the refugee experience for children? What are their aims?**
- **How are these books mediated by teachers when sharing them with children?**
- **How do refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to these texts?**

I will now take each question in order, to discuss my findings with regards to the separate parts of the process, and then combine them in order to re-examine the initial question.

## **10.2 Authors' motivations and aims**

This section will address the first of three sub-questions:

- **What are the motivations of authors who write about the refugee experience for children? What are their aims?**

As we have seen in previous chapters, the text is not innocent, but contains both “a story and a significance” (Hollindale, 1988). Post-modern approaches to literature suggest that it is an advantage to know something about the author’s background, context, motivation and process of research and writing, to understand why they have created this particular story and what its significance is.

### **10.2.1 Background to the authors**

My focus on the authors of these books in Chapter 5 threw up some interesting comparisons regarding their reasons for writing the two books, both personal and political. As already discussed, the profiles of Naidoo and Hoffman have intriguing similarities and differences, which are linked to their motivation for writing the books in question. Born in 1943 and 1945 respectively, they are part of a post Second World War generation of authors for whom migration was an ever-growing reality. Naidoo has a clear post-colonial background, growing up in South Africa, as the daughter of Jewish migrants. Arrested and imprisoned under the apartheid regime, she herself became a refugee in 1965, and fled to the UK. In contrast, Hoffman has lived her life in the UK, but also has migration from Germany in her ancestry, and possible Jewish heritage. Interestingly, both women are married to people with post-colonial origins. They therefore have migration in their background, and have embraced “difference” through their marriages, but one has direct experience of exile, and comes from a far more politically complex background.

Both women have impressive academic credentials. However, Hoffman is a prolific author, focussing mostly on fantasy books, and writing only a few “issues books” (for want of a better term), looking at gender, race, and migration such as in the “Grace” series. In contrast, Naidoo has published fewer books, which are mainly set in Africa, usually taking challenging situations and subject matter as her starting point, and tackling the post-colonial experience head on. Both authors have however been questioned at one time or other about their credentials as white women writing about black children’s lives. hooks (1990) asserts that through this means, ethnic minorities’ experience is colonized again by the researcher or writer. In their interviews both women were highly conscious of their position as gatekeepers of the refugee experience, but preferred to see themselves as mouthpieces, in the absence of others, to “speak for the subaltern”, to borrow Spivak’s words (1988), or give voice to the voiceless. Both writers would welcome refugee authors to contribute to the genre, but saw that crafting a work of literature was a skill that should be open to all regardless of background.

### **10.2.2 Motivations for writing**

Obviously authors write because they want to communicate ideas to readers, via the medium of words, but motivations are broader than that. The career of a children’s author, just as with any writer, is subject to the vagaries of the publishing market, and a path is often carefully steered between what the author wants to write and what will sell profitably. As already mentioned, Rose (1984) asserts that children’s literature is commissioned, written, and chosen for reading primarily by adults, be it publishers, writers, teachers or parents, and nowhere is this more true than in the choice of a class text, where children are rarely consulted. However these insights give another layer of meaning to “giving voice to the voiceless”, as authors are writing from the perspective of children, as well as here, on behalf of refugees.

Most authors draw heavily on their own life experiences, and those of others such as family, friends, and people encountered in a variety of situations, as well as those they may never meet. However beyond the personal, there is

also a wider more socio-political terrain to consider. Thus Hollindale (1988) asserts that we must consider the author's own individual ideology, notions of social justice, and moral convictions, (so strong in Naidoo that she was prepared to go to prison in defence of them), that are reflected overtly and covertly in the text. Furthermore (as Hollindale (1988) notes) the influence of the political climate at the time of writing, such as the arrival and poor treatment of waves of refugees, impacts greatly on some authors, as Hoffman mentions in her interview. Jameson (1981) suggests that all interpretations of reality are part of a broader ideological movement, and therefore art and literature can also operate counter to dominant discourses to expose and critique certain political standpoints such as anti-refugee media discourses.

Here we have two authors who are prepared to engage with controversial issues, such as racism, forced migration, the effects of war, state-sponsored terrorism and bullying, one having experienced exile herself. Whether they are highlighting an "issue", propounding a "message", or "bearing witness" (as Naidoo prefers) they are incorporating into their writing some powerful themes, and this was part of their underlying motivation in deciding to write the books in question. Sometimes these agendas were made explicit, such as when Hoffman spoke of wanting to counter anti-refugee government initiatives and hostile media treatment, and when Naidoo was keen to point out the intertextuality of her writing, and the powerful effect of linking with real life events in Nigeria at the time. Hoffman focussed more directly on the dual purpose of her text – as a window or a mirror (Bishop, 1992), to help non-refugee children understand about a situation beyond their personal horizons, and for refugees to see their lives reflected in children's literature, but both writers aim to bring circumstances not normally discussed with children to the fore.

As we have seen in Chapter 5, the two authors in this study began from very different starting points. Naidoo's was a much more personal choice of subject matter, linked to developing her writing career beyond the confines of South African settings, but very much steeped in the socio-political climate of the time – the end of apartheid in South Africa in 1990, the hanging of Ken

Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria in 1995, and the murder of Damilola Taylor in London in 2000. In contrast, Hoffman's initial contact was less spontaneous in nature, as she was approached by the publisher, Frances Lincoln, to write a picture book about the refugee experience. However, yet again her motivating influences derived from global contexts - the European Year against Racism in 1997, which gave her initial tastes of refugee children's experiences, and the choice of Somalia as generating the most refugees in the UK and USA at that time, but with very few books depicting a Somali child. It could be argued, though, that Hoffman's work is more distanced, as she had never visited Somalia herself, and Naidoo's deeper personal knowledge of the Nigerian situation, gave her a more contextualised and nuanced start. Nevertheless both writers, being at the forefront of their craft, undertook extensive research prior to writing, to achieve authenticity wherever possible, Hoffman becoming involved in refugee outreach and drop-in provision, and Naidoo visiting Nigerian friends in Lagos, as well as schools and an immigration centre in the UK.

### **10.2.3 Aims of the two authors**

The two writers, Hoffman and Naidoo, talked about some similar, but also some different aims in their writing of *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth*. Naidoo focussed on taking the reader on a journey of discovery, leading them to ask questions and challenge prejudice. She talked of depicting a period in Nigeria's history, exploring character and circumstance, and not necessarily leading to a perfect resolution or "happy ending". The journey metaphor echoes the three parts of the refugee model of adaptation, as shown by Hamilton and Moore (2004), the pre-, trans- and post-migration ecologies that are all part of the experience, and are present in detail in the book. They are also visible, although non-chronologically in Hoffman's picture book, and both texts can therefore be said to reflect the process of seeking sanctuary effectively.

However when it came to reader response, Naidoo had a clearer idea of how her book had been received by children, partly because of the age of her readers, and their greater ability to articulate thoughts and feelings, Hoffman

being more focussed on teachers' appreciation of her book for the same reason. It may also be that Naidoo had spent more time in schools finding out about the response to *The Other Side of Truth*, as she has published fewer books, and this one is particularly well-read. Thus she has had more opportunity to focus on the response of refugee children in particular, and spoke confidently of their appreciation communicated to her verbally and by e.mail. Hoffman, in contrast, has published far more books, and may well have pitched her visits around other work, particularly her "Stravaganza" series which is aimed at early teenage readers.

Neither author was entirely clear of the potential effect of their books on refugee readers, but hoped that they were useful and affirming. This raises the question of whether authors have a responsibility towards their readers' wellbeing. I would suggest that when dealing with such controversial and sensitive subject matter as contained in these two books, authors need to consider the response of the "actual" reader (Iser (1972, first published in English 1974), discussed in Chapter 3). Whether the aim is to educate or validate, to hold up "windows or mirrors" (Bishop, 1990), it must follow that some regard to child readers' sensibilities is due. Literature may provide catharsis, Nicholson and Pearson (2003) drawing together evidence from several sources to recommend the use of children's literature by trained counsellors to help children cope with fears, both real and imagined. However areas such as trauma therapy, and "bibliotherapy" (Crothers, 1916) (Shrodes, 1950), are outside the remit of children's authors, and teachers in classrooms, and need to be handled with extreme care.

For non-refugee children, as already stated, the aims of both authors were clearly to help them "read the word and the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987), to access the imaginative "suppose" paradigm of Harding (1962 & 1977), leading to a widening of their own horizons. Probably inadvertently, both authors also helped children from a refugee background who had not necessarily been through such events themselves, to understand the experiences that their parents and other family members may have had, born out in children's responses, particularly in Chapter 9. Furthermore, if critical literacy should

ideally lead to “taking action and promoting social justice” (Lewison, et al., 2002, p. 382), this element is difficult to achieve. Hoffman was clear that she hoped children would be more welcoming of others as a result of reading her book, and Naidoo spoke of social action, such as becoming part of the Anti-Apartheid movement in the past, or working towards peace in the Middle East today. The latter are dramatic claims for the power of literature, but if “praxis” (Freire, 1970) i.e. practical action, is the ultimate goal, then this should be the logical conclusion of both authors’ motivations in writing these texts, be it at a classroom, school, community or global level.

#### 10.2.4 The reading transaction

Rosenblatt (1978) identified the reading experience as like a circuit created between writer, text and reader, each one a different “event” from the previous one. She saw reading as a “transaction” between the three parts, but never developed a diagrammatic model of her idea. I imagine it would look something like this, with the author having a direct relationship with the text, the reader/text interaction as a two way process as the reader brings their own lived experience to the text, as well as developing new horizons through it, but with the direct reader to author exchange usually as the weak link of the circuit, see Figure 25.

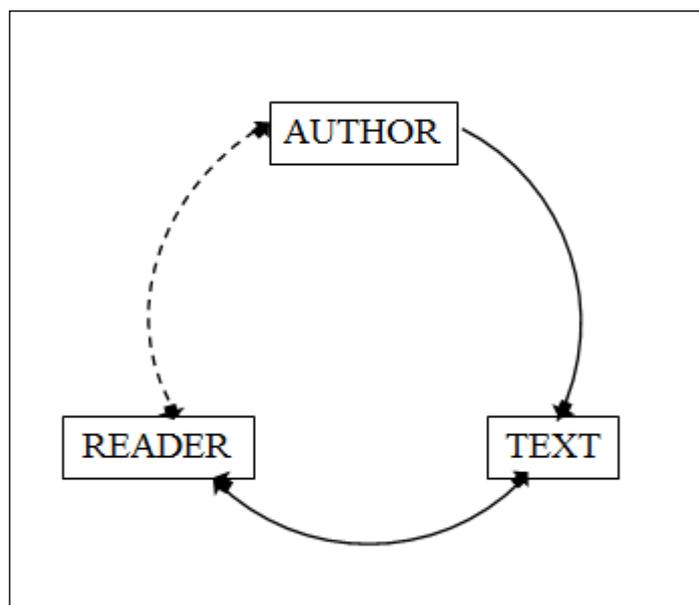


Figure 25: The Reading Circuit: adapted from Rosenblatt (1978)

It is only through the “dialogism” of the text, manifest in the narrator’s voice, the narrative, and the characters that the author communicates meaning to the reader (Bakhtin, 1934), and also through the illustrations in a picture book, as discussed earlier. However authors’ websites, articles written, and interviews given are other ways that the writer can communicate with the reader, but also most importantly for this study, an author visit to a school (for example) can give a rich opportunity for children to meet the writer, and directly interact with them through hearing a talk and asking valuable questions. The author also obtains feedback from adult readers, in the form of reviews and feedback, but this is less garnered from children. Meeting child readers in person is a rewarding experience for authors, but also gives them a rare chance to find out what young readers really think of their work. Judging by how much value Hoffman and Naidoo gave to positive feedback from child readers, this is a necessary part of the reading cycle, and also I would suggest part of the responsibility of writers of children’s literature, especially when dealing with challenging and controversial issues, as children are deeply impressionable and more vulnerable to negative influences than perhaps adults are.

### ***10.3 Teachers as mediators***

This section addresses my second sub-question:

- **How are these books mediated by teachers when sharing them with children?**

It is based on data from the two chapters which look at the role of the teacher sharing both books in the classroom, and sets up comparisons between approaches to the two books.

Rosenblatt (1978) and also the two authors in the study, did not always acknowledge the important role that teachers play in the reading transaction when sharing class texts, even though Naidoo (1992) herself criticised the

powerful and, to her mind, misguided perspective of the teacher when conducting research for her PhD. I would suggest my findings demonstrate that the vision, socio-political perspective, and contextual knowledge of the teachers in the study were crucial for the success of teaching about the refugee experience, far more so than I had originally thought, because of the power they held in mediating the text. Harding (1962 & 1977) talks of the reader as a non-participant relation in the reading process, with an evaluative function, similar to that of a gossip passing on news. However this does not properly acknowledge the active role of the reader in the reading “event” (Rosenblatt, 1938). I would say this analogy works best for the role of teacher, who also interacts with the authorial voice, the narrative, and the characters in the text, (Bakhtin, 1934), but who filters the experience, as if passing on second-hand news, but with huge capacity to twist the message, as seen particularly in Chapter 6. As a mediator, the teacher is thus in a pivotal position in the reading of a class text.

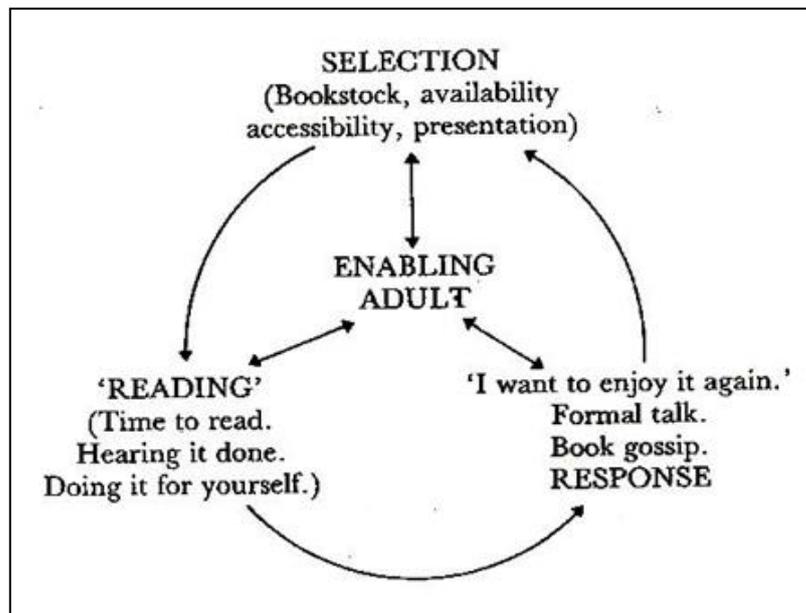
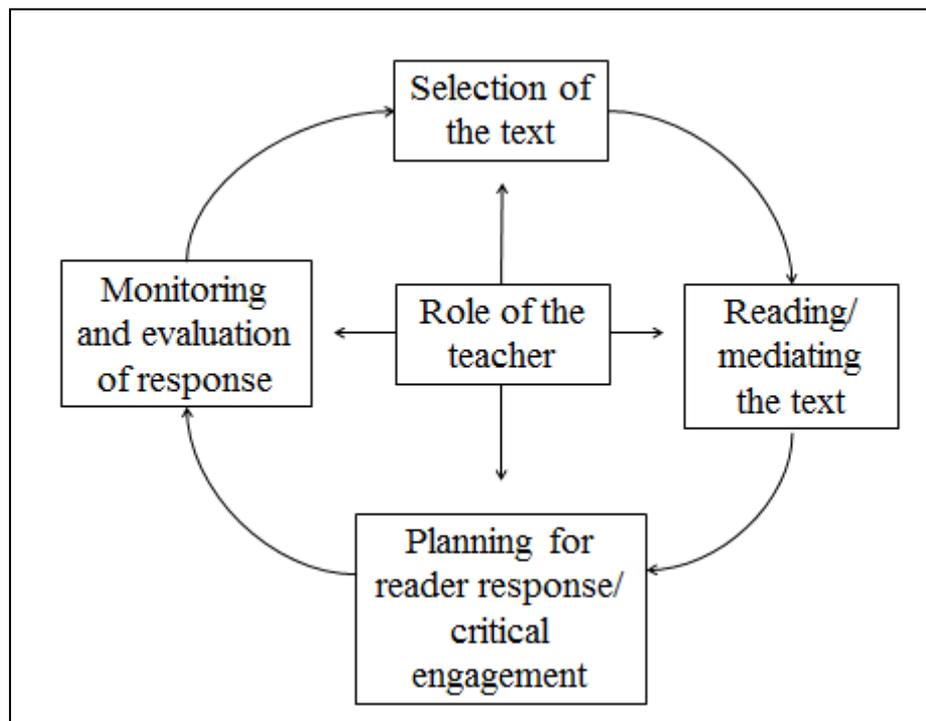


Figure 26: "The Reading Circle": Chambers (1991)

Chambers (1993) saw the role of the “enabling adult”, be they teacher, parent or carer, as a very powerful one in building a “community of readers”, but criticised the control a teacher may take over reading process – steering the class to a reading that they want to reconstruct. In his “Tell Me” model, he introduced the idea of a “Reading Circle” (see Figure 26, repeated from Chapter 3) whereby the reader selects the text, reads it and then encourages response, through talk, which leads to selection of further books. I have re-drawn the reading circle (clockwise this time!) although again I think it would actually be spiral in nature, as the teacher moves on to select a new text, and have therefore called it a “cycle”, see Figure 27. My study shows that role of the teacher is not always active in the selection of texts, but is central to the reading and mediating of the text, and the planning for reader response, both oral and written. However I would suggest that a key function of all teachers is to monitor and evaluate the response, in order to assess children’s understanding of the text, and also to inform future choices of suitable and challenging texts that would engage the class and engender quality response.



**Figure 27: The role of the teacher in the reading cycle**

I have therefore looked at the role of the teacher under these four headings, as themes deriving from the data I collected.

### **10.3.1 Selection of texts and curriculum constraints**

As already discussed in Chapter 4, the choice of texts in my study was at my own request, for the purposes of research in Year 1 and Year 5, although it was acknowledged by the teachers involved that both books were commonly read in the primary classroom. This is obviously not a regular occurrence. Only in Year 3 had the text been selected before my arrival, as an LA EMAS advisor had been brought into the school to plan and deliver a special literacy unit which would appeal to the diverse nature of the school population, and hopefully engage more children in reading for interest/transformation. Thus in all classes the choice of text was not made by the teacher. We are therefore exploding the myth that the “enabling adult” always selects the book, and the diagram seems to need adjustment already. Furthermore the choice of text at the request of the child/ren is even more unusual, and very rare indeed. (See Yandell (2013), for a discussion of both previous points.) In Pennac’s (2006) *The Rights of the Reader*, ten basic principles about reading are outlined, but do not include “the right to choose the book you are reading yourself.” As fundamental to fostering an enjoyment of reading, it seems that Pennac takes this as given. However in the classroom it is only during so-called “independent reading” that children might be able to choose their own reading matter.

Generally, the text is chosen by teachers collaboratively, or by the Literacy Coordinator, as part of agreed curriculum planning across the school, but the decisions are often taken as part of a wider literacy initiative. For example if a school has bought in to the “Power of Reading” project, designed by CLPE, mentioned in Chapter 6, they will supply recommended booklists and suggested planning outlines that schools are keen to use. Although seen as a model of good practice for using quality literature, and including drama and writing in role, CLPE exerts considerable power over Literacy planning across London at the current time, as was noted in Year 3. *The Colour of Home* and

*The Other Side of Truth* both recommended by CLPE, with a scheme of work provided for the latter, are usually chosen for “efferent” capacity – imparting knowledge, but during the reading teachers often play on the affective side of the story to draw children in. However CLPE does include a warning at the beginning of their scheme of work for *The Other Side of Truth* that “Teachers will need to be sensitive to the fact that there may be individual children within the class who have experienced the loss of a parent or even arrival as a refugee.”

### **10.3.2 Reading the text aloud and facilitating discussion.**

In Chapters 6 and 8 it was seen that teachers “give voice” to the text as they read, and it is during this reading transaction that the immensely powerful role of the teacher is easily visible. During the reading the teacher “actualises” the text (Iser, 1976, first published in English in 1978), often competing the gaps or blanks for the reader. S/he also “concretises” elements of the text by highlighting some areas and demoting or excluding unwanted or incomprehensible parts of the story, so that the text has been strongly filtered by the time it reaches the child. How this is done reflects the tacit ideology of the teacher themselves, for example playing up the violence of the refugee experience, or choosing to focus on “softer” issues such as leaving a cat behind, or confronting language barriers and making new friendships, as in Chapter 6 in particular.

Both teachers in Year 1 employed a similar questioning style, demonstrating aspects of closed questioning, beginning mainly with comprehension and recall, but also, particularly in Nerys’ case, somewhat more open-ended questions, asking for children’s opinions and allowing for multiple responses. However this “booktalk” (Chambers, 1995) also demonstrated the influence of other planning formats on the teacher’s professional practice (such as the Pearson plan, which steered Nerys to focus on war as a topic), and questioning may therefore be less open than it appears, being steered by the exigencies of the lesson plan and the learning objectives. “Dialogic engagement” (Aukerman, 2012, p. 42) in Year 3 was more open-ended and

speculative, perhaps due to the older age-group of the children in the class. Charlie focussed intently on relating to children's lived experience, stressing empathy with the protagonist through asking children how they would feel in similar circumstances and dwelling mainly on language barriers and newness as concepts. He also displayed the influences of Chambers "Tell Me" approach (1993) explained in full in Chapter 3, where children are asked to discuss likes, dislikes, patterns and puzzles in the text, adopted by CLPE's "Power of Reading" project, which was used by the school. In Year 5, while Violet explicitly encouraged children to accept each other's multiple viewpoints, Sophie felt a pressure to elicit a written response from children as proof of real engagement, to meet the demands of the Literacy curriculum, Ofsted, school management teams, and even parents, as discussed in Chapter 8.

Thus it emerged in Chapters 6 and 8 that teachers are part of a broader arena. From commercially produced plans and the Literacy curriculum, to the pressure to produce written response rather than enjoy the reading and discussion around a text, teachers are influenced by a myriad of perspectives. Agendas which may not be immediately obvious, such as government policy, school planning, and learning objectives, weigh heavily on the practice of teachers in the classroom, sometimes subverting them from a clear engagement with the text. However there are also sites of positive inspiration, in this case CLPE's "Power of Reading" project, the LA advisor's scheme of work, and Woodberry Down's school website, mentioned in the above chapter, which were all invaluable resources in teacher planning.

Teachers are also part of an "interpretive community" (Fish, 1980) which precedes the reading, and in their mediation of the texts, their own cultural baggage and contextual knowledge is exposed clearly. It was disappointing that, apart from Sam, teachers did not bring their own life stories, and possibly migratory backgrounds, to the classroom to demonstrate their own links with the books. Perhaps they need more encouragement to do this from ITE programmes, and in CPD. Teachers' own contextual knowledge impacted greatly on their role as mediators, helping children to "read the world" through

the texts, in conversations about Halal food, school in Somalia, the identification of famous Nigerians, and good locational knowledge, all of which added depth and context to the books. However there is always a danger of “othering” the post-colonial subject in the text (Said, 1983). Sam was a good example of sensitive handling of the refugee experience, making clear differences between forced and voluntary migration (“Did Hassan have a choice?”), the importance of a strong relationship web, the possibility of resilience and adaptation, but also the lifelong and unresolved consequences of dislocation, as in Chapter 8.

### **10.3.3 Planning for reader response and critical engagement**

Stephens (1992) maintains that reader response is dangerous in creating the illusion that purely personal reaction to texts is possible, rather than creating awareness of the political and ideological undercurrents that underpin all writing, which is part of critical literacy. Teachers have an important role in fostering an understanding that texts are motivated rather than innocent (McDonald, 2004). Activities which ask children to think about why the author has written the book, and why they have chosen to focus on refugee issues, would be part of this. However, teaching at all levels contained very little of this holistic approach to the text. In Chapter 6, Nerys in Year 1, tried hard to ask children what they thought the message of the books was. With insufficient time to develop these ideas properly, children struggled with this analysis. In the other Year 1 class, April asked “higher ability” children “What do you think about this book?” a question that asked for children’s opinions of the text. However without oral rehearsal, children did not answer this question in their writing, mainly retelling parts of the story. April and Nerys were both teachers who had strongly held political views in regard to refugee issues, and a commitment to critical pedagogy, but a combination of the age of the children, and the lack of time devoted to reading and responding to the book, conspired against any real development of individualised reader response, let alone critical literacy, although it is fair to acknowledge that they were addressing it through PSHCE instead of Literacy.

Year 3 planning was based on the scheme of work devised by the LA advisor, which included useful activities to teach about the refugee experience, following through the three stages as identified by Hamilton and Moore (2004). However the EMAS focus meant that even though some drama, role play and writing in role was included, the end result was the production of a book, which was somewhat formulaic, constructed as it was through overly-scaffolded writing frames and leaving very little room for individual response. Furthermore, Charlie departed from this plan and lost the three stages of the refugee experience in the process, including a very important lesson on reasons why people leave their country of origin. However he did manage to engage children very powerfully when asking them to draw a picture and then scrub it out, as Hassan had done. Charlie also relinquished the LA advisor's plan for a PSHCE lesson in which children considered which ten things they would pack in a suitcase if they had to leave home in a hurry, which would have been a useful adjunct to the study of the book.

Instead, planning in Year 3 focussed more on responding to feelings generated by the reading through creative activities culminating in children making their own books. Although considering alternatives to a text is often seen as part of critical literacy, here children could write just about moving, and again the more controversial and political aspects of the refugee experience were circumnavigated. However by asking the children to write speech bubbles as a pupil or teacher when a new arrival joins the class, a useful exercise in welcoming was carried out, which could be seen as a form of "social action". Charlie tried hard to relate the text to children's lives in the class, but he did not locate the book within a larger Somali context, or relate it to other books by the same author, which would have highlighted the "constructed" nature of the text. Even a Skype interview set up with the author did not focus on the subject matter of the book, or the refugee experience at all, questions being more general in nature. Similarly in Year 5, there was no planning to address the "constructedness" of text or criticise it, in order to suggest possible alternative approaches, which is at the heart of critical literacy. The author visit was the only time when this occurred, as Naidoo talked in an assembly about the context and influences on her work, and in

particular the reasons for writing the book. Here children could ask purposeful questions directly to the author, and this was excellent “dialogic pedagogy” in action, with an opportunity to find out the motivation and aims of the author.

In Year 5 the planning, spread over 6 weeks, was richer in content and appeared to engage more with refugee issues than in Year 3. The scheme of work from the Woodberry Downs website brought a cross-curricular agenda and a consideration of the refugee experience. Furthermore a drama scenario called “Everyone Everywhere – Refugees and Asylum” (Amnesty International, n.d.) contained within it the same idea of choosing 10 things to pack in a suitcase, when forced to flee quickly. Opportunities to take “social action” are harder to achieve, but inviting in a speaker from Refugee Week about “Simple Acts” that children could make to welcome refugees was a step towards this, although possibly still “othering” refugee children, in its assumption that these simple acts would be “done to” refugees. Sophie also commented on her doubts about the future effect reading *The Other Side of Truth* might have on children, for example if encountering bullying at Secondary School. Generally, however, Sophie’s planning encompassed refugee issues of persecution, flight, bullying, racism, and deportation, requiring in-depth contextual knowledge and a willingness to confront socio-political issues. Through, for example, a drama activity arguing for and against granting immigration status, children were exposed to conflicting discourses about migration, which Sophie found quite challenging to manage. Purposeful planning, involving activities with real life objectives, such as contributing to the school newsletter, gave a sense that such active responses shaped the curriculum, to take literacy “beyond the book”. In small discussion groups children displayed a high level of engagement, but it was regrettable that teachers had no chance to access this small group feedback, as they had responsibility for the whole class.

#### **10.3.4 Monitoring and evaluating response**

The final role of the teacher as part of the “Reading Cycle” that I added in was that of monitoring and evaluating pupil response. Ideally, and in Chambers’

original Reading Circle (1993), response would inform future selections (or non-selections). However we have already seen how with curriculum strictures the teacher is not usually in control of the selection process and neither is the child. A possible outcome for the future might be that the text inspires children to read more books by the same author independently, or more on the same subject, as we saw in Year 5 when some children in the class started to read “Web of Lies” (Naidoo, 2004), Naidoo’s sequel to *The Other Side of Truth*. There can be no better proof of reader engagement than choosing to read follow-up texts, as adults do.

The ongoing monitoring of responses is an important part of the teacher’s role in mediating the text for children and also for planning activities for children to engage in. As we have discussed, an awareness of refugee children, or those from a refugee background, is important knowledge for a teacher to hold in order to meet the needs of those children adequately. All teachers in the study said they had no refugees in their class when it was clearly not the case, and some were not even aware of children from a refugee background although others were. This lack of awareness of the “actual reader” (Iser, 1972, first published in English 1974) and “assumptions of commonality” (Chambers, 1993) was disappointing. While some see the role of the teacher as building a “community of readers” (ibid), it is important to access individual responses, and not be pitching the commentary, questioning and discussion to an “implied reader” (Iser, 1972, first published in English 1974). What the study clearly identifies is the lack of teacher time and opportunity to find out about children’s lives on an individual level, rather than their unwillingness to do so.

It is also a vital part of the teacher’s role to evaluate the effect of literature that deals with controversial and potentially disturbing issues on children in the class, in order to deal with distress if it arises. Some children were clearly affected by the shocking and violent subject matter in both *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth*, and care needs to be taken that their emotional reaction to texts is monitored and ameliorated. Similarly the inappropriate relishing of violence has been thrown up as a possibility, and

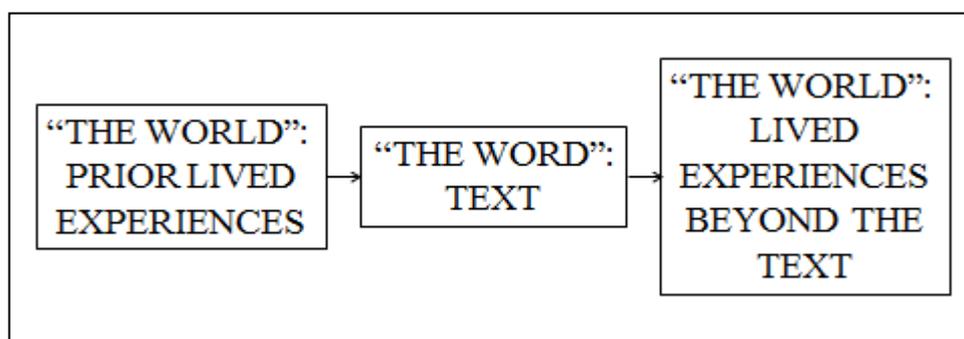
ways to channel this towards a useful engagement with the text remains an ongoing challenge. As well as possible experiences of forced migration, factors such as loss of or estrangement from a parent, missing family members, death of pets etc. also need to be taken into account when reading both of the books in question. If teachers are aware of the personal histories of their pupils on many fronts, this is useful information that can be used to direct discussion and planning in the right ways, with sensitive appreciation. Teachers in the study showed consideration for these eventualities, but also felt that the books were positive in their ability to bring up contentious issues, and help children question their assumptions.

#### **10.4 Children making meaning**

This section looks at the third sub-question about the two books, and asks:

- **How do refugee and non-refugee children read, understand and respond to these texts?**

As already discussed, Freire and Macedo (1987) see reading as a process of engagement through one's own lived experience, but also that takes the reader on journeys beyond this. Children may also make connections during the reading that the author has not even thought of themselves (see Figure 28). Literature fills gaps that real life cannot always supply, and by virtue of this fact can be emancipatory and transformatory.



**Figure 28: “Reading the word and the world”, adapted from Freire & Macedo (1987)**

Children's voices need to be heard in critiquing children's literature, and as part of the politics of voice (Spivak, 1988) (hooks, 1990) we should consider the responses of "actual" rather than "implied" readers (Iser, 1972, first published in English 1974), which this study has tried to do. Bishop (1992) uses the metaphor of "mirrors, windows and sliding glass doors" in terms of reader response, whereby children see themselves reflected in literature, or learn about the lives of others, entering into them for the duration of the reading. However Schwart (1995) sees this as too simplistic, and dichotomous, calling for a more global understanding of the universality of human experience (see Britton (1993)). Rather than active "identification" with characters, Harding (1962 & 1977) suggests that the reader has a more evaluative attitude, exploring the imaginative and empathetic "suppose if...." possibilities suggested in the text. Let us now look at these viewpoints by comparing the responses from children in the study.

#### **10.4.1 Understanding the refugee experience**

As noted in Chapter 7, the written and drawn responses from Year 1 to the *Colour of Home* embraced all parts of the refugee continuum (pre-, trans-, and post- migrations, see Hamilton and Moore (2004)) between them. However they did mainly focus on the beginning of the story, where Hassan faces his new class in the UK and generally reflected the positive elements in their writing and drawing. In April's class some children, even in the "lower ability" group, did include the violent aspects, for example mentioning the soldiers. In Nerys' class, more negative emotions were reported than in April's, children alluding to sad feelings and all referring to bullets, guns and war in their writing. The concept of war had been drawn out by Nerys explicitly in her reading of the book and this was directly reflected in the children's writing, demonstrating yet again the key role of the teacher as mediator of the text, and the power that they have to influence the children's interpretation. However overall it seems that in Year 1, meaning was made at some level, and basic concepts of the refugee experience were transmitted from the book, and the teacher, to the children.

In Year 3, children's engagement in both class and small group discussion, as well as written and drawn response, indicated a good understanding of all three parts of the refugee experience. Some children demonstrated deep empathy with Hassan, through highly evocative vocabulary, graphically drawn pictures and sensitivity in discussion. In particular all children engaged with the post-migration concepts of missing home and the need to make friends, and only in a few cases was a difference noted between children from a refugee background, and those who were not. Given that most of the class had some form of migration in their family histories, they could relate to the general themes of dislocation and "otherness" depicted in the book. However, even those who had experienced moving school could feel some form of identification and empathy, and all had witnessed classmates who had arrived not speaking English, being well-versed in welcoming techniques through the general school ethos.

In Chapter 9 it was noted that Year 5 children were still not certain of the precise definition of a refugee, when questioned by me. However, as with Year 1 and 3, they were clear on all three aspects of the refugee experience, the pre-, trans-, and post-migratory factors as identified by Hamilton and Moore (2004), but were able to discuss each phase in more depth and with greater sophistication than in the younger years. Many displayed insightful understanding, as if looking through a "window" on pre-migratory aspects specific to the refugee situation, that leaving one's home country was not just to get a better life, but was motivated by danger, perhaps the threat of death and the need for safety, often being related to war. Two Somali boys related strongly to Mariam's story, contained within the larger narrative of *The Other Side of Truth* – a dramatic trans-migratory tale of a family travelling initially on foot and then by boat from Somalia to Kenya, and finally by plane to London. However this did not directly "mirror" their own experience. One child, recently arrived, from Nigeria, did relate to the geographical aspects of moving from Lagos to London, as something he himself had done, and was also aware of post-migratory problems, such as being teased. Through drama activities, the class had internalised post-migratory problems and had opportunities to explore multiple discourses, such as the angle taken by hostile immigration

officials and those defending the right to claim asylum, thus metaphorically walking in and out of “sliding glass doors” to variously experience other lives and points of view.

#### **10.4.2 Response from refugee children**

Children’s responses to *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* therefore demonstrated that a simple dichotomy between refugee and non-refugee children, in considering their reactions, was a blunt and unworkable instrument. Apart from being unable to tell which children were refugees, who was from a refugee background, and who had simply migrated to the UK (very few children being of White British origin in all classes researched), it seemed from children’s own stories that there was a blurred boundary between forced and voluntary migration, “push” and “pull” factors creating more of a continuum than a reactive/proactive contrast (Richmond, 1993).

Any attempt to categorise the children was therefore fruitless, but it did seem that although there was good understanding of the refugee experience across all age groups, in some cases those from a refugee background provided more contextual details in their response, in Year 3 in particular. However in other cases children’s individual sensibilities seemed more important than the specific details of their migration status.

In Year 1 there were markedly differing responses from various children with a Somali, and therefore probably refugee, background to the reading of the book. Their reaction was also important as *The Colour of Home* is rare in its focus on a Somali child’s adaptation to a UK classroom. April’s approach to this context had been indirect; drawing out that Hassan was from Somalia at the outset, as in the text, but not highlighting the Somali children in particular. Afterwards, during the follow-up work in her class, the two second-generation Somalis were happy to talk to me about their reaction to the book. In contrast, Nerys immediately pointed out the two children in the class who were from a Somali background. During the reading one Somali child appeared to be very sensitive to the spotlight that she had been put under, and did not engage with

the book, although Nerys' maintained that her diffidence was due to more general communication problems. Similarly, in Year 3, both children from a Somali background expressed acute ambivalence, each being embarrassed, but with one saying he liked the book, and the other displaying immense pride in her country, although seeming to dream about the disturbing content too.

In Year 5, two girls found *The Other Side of Truth* disturbing. One, from Ivory Coast, objected to the subject matter and felt her own life experiences had a bearing on her unwillingness to engage with the content. The other, a girl from Nigeria, having possibly spent time in a refugee camp, also referred to dreaming about the book after reading it, and related it closely to some undisclosed danger she had been close to. These reactions, as well as the negative elements of responses from children in Year 1 and 3, need to be given credence, if we are to have a balanced view of the effect of the book on children throughout the year groups, and how to manage these adverse feelings stimulated is part of the challenge for teachers when introducing texts about the refugee experience into the primary classroom.

#### **10.4.3 Considering the refugee perspective**

Some negative attitudes to migration and asylum were hinted in the discussion groups, and still a degree of stigma persisted through discourse emanating from beyond the classroom and the school. This meant that, despite several opportunities, in a variety of situations, children were shy to disclose their own refugee status, while being happy to talk about parents and grandparents being refugees. No one in Year 5 had acknowledged being a refugee, but most children felt that a hypothetical refugee child might be disturbed by the subject matter of the book, possibly being reminded of what has happened to them. Debate raged about whether reading the text in class might cause them embarrassment, as they might not want to be known or defined as a refugee, or it might mean that they could talk to friends about their situation rather than feel isolated. What was interesting was that neither viewpoint predominated, and children changed their minds during the discussion, illustrating the power of “dialogic engagement” (Aukerman, 2012) around texts.

One child in Year 5 (see Chapter 9) put forward the argument that reading the book in class was for the greater good and that all children need to know about the potential situation it portrayed. Some suggested that a refugee might be taken out of class for separate reading, or that the teacher might read the book when the child wasn't there, both thoughtful and sensitive examples of taking "social action" to protect refugees from distress, but also not particularly practical. Their comments also link well to Naidoo's viewpoint that children need to engage with powerful issues, even if it reflects their own history and experience, so that their own background stories are seen in a positive light rather than being taboo. In terms of forming or changing attitudes, the transformative potential of literature, that was so strongly part of Freire's thinking, may be more important in children's books, as young people's prejudices may not be so deep-seated, so that a text might be able to challenge them more easily.

#### **10.4.4 Talking about own lives**

Several children in Year 1 were prompted by *The Colour of Home* to talk of their country of origin and experiences of moving between places, showing how common hybrid identities are in the post-modern world (Hall, 1992) (Bhabha, 1994). Language barriers were also living realities for two children, when returning to their family in another country for short visits. In Year 3 reading the book also generated a huge amount of discussion of personal experiences. It seemed that migration for any reason generated a mixture of contradictory feelings, and was not related to levels of violence but memories of family, friends, and animals left behind. Reading *The Other Side of Truth* also acted as a catalyst to unleash a myriad of personal contributions that children could offer in response to the text. When discussing reasons for migration they talked of the "pull" factors such as employment and improved educational opportunities. They also identified the "push" factors of poverty, violence, or war. Interestingly, they were happy to disclose that their parents and grandparents had been refugees, but not themselves, and told stories of their parents' experiences of language barriers, lack of familiarity with the

currency, poverty and homelessness. Here there was a gender divide as these family snapshots came mainly from girls, women and girls being traditionally the keepers of family history (Fiese, et al., 1995), alluded to in Chapter 9.

The child most recently arrived from Nigeria displayed pride in his nationality, which was not affected by the negative portrayal of the country in the book, for example about corruption. In fact he seemed to feel empowered by a personal link to the story, but sadly was never consulted as the “expert”, which could have been easily achieved if the teacher had sensed that he would have enjoyed this role, thus raising standing in the class, self-esteem, and possibly academic engagement. Another child of Nigerian origin, who was possibly a refugee, seemed more disturbed by the book, but also spoke of positive memories brought back in the reading, with the possible result that this experience had brought a sort of catharsis. These dichotomous reactions were noticeable amongst the Somali children in Year 1 and Year 3 as previously mentioned, and seemed to therefore be a fairly typical mixture of pride, embarrassment and emotional engagement, felt by children when encountering a book rooted in their own country of origin, a key issue for teachers to be aware of and address sensitively.

#### **10.4.5 Empathy and “social action”**

In small group discussions in Year 1 children exhibited a good understanding of the need for a solid “relationship web” (Baker, 1983) and the importance of making friends in a new environment. They were proactive in identifying strategies to welcome new children such as using same language buddying systems. Similarly, children in Year 3 showed high degrees of empathy when responding to the theme of “newness” (the “aesthetic” side of reading) and talked of being new to a class as “scary”. They understood and identified with fears of bullying and sadness in missing home and family, and in some cases confronting language barriers. Their responses reflected a proactive approach, building on the concept of resilience. As in Year 1, many children used their knowledge of the world and the classroom to suggest ways in which

these problems could be overcome through “social action”, an important part of critical literacy. Rutter (2006) feels that when dealing with refugees, empathy is not enough and pity discourses can lead to non-action. Children in Year 5 were overwhelmingly positive about *The Other Side of Truth* as a book and pointed out that it was not part of their usual reading repertoire, waxing lyrical about the learning they had derived from it (the “efferent” reading), its social relevance, and present day application. They also showed high levels of “aesthetic” engagement, demonstrating deep empathy for the novel’s protagonists, but also for potential refugee readers, and had sensitive suggestions for how to overcome any distress that the book might cause to such children. Again taking “social action” in the future, as a product of the reading experience, is impossible to measure, but it seemed that children across the age groups already had a powerful sense of what practical steps they could take to support refugee children in current classrooms.

#### **10.4.6 Gender differences in reaction to violence**

Children in Year 3 reacted to the disturbing subject matter of the book in highly gendered ways, unlike in Year 1 or Year 5. It was striking that gender differences were already very strongly visible at this age, with boys being more “resistant” readers, and challenging the expected response that teachers and other adults would have hoped for. Far from being upset by the violence in the story, some boys appeared to be relishing it and became difficult to handle during the group discussion (see Chapter 7). Two of these boys were from countries undergoing dramatic and violent upheaval, and perhaps were reacting to what they had seen or heard about by emulating it. In contrast all girls showed sympathy for and sometimes strong empathy with Hassan’s plight, whether they had experience of migration or were from second-generation migrant families. Some were disturbed by the subject matter, a clear demonstration of the “aesthetic” and emotional reaction that can be achieved by reading. Such differing response from across the gender divide in Year 3 concurs with Naidoo’s own research (1992) where she found that girls were much more moved by disturbing racism in children’s literature than boys in her study were. How far boys feel restricted to show their “affective” side in

front of a class, both at primary and secondary level is a matter of conjecture, but a differing response from one boy demonstrates that children's actions are highly dependent on context, and that gendered identities are constructed and performed in particular sites, and may differ according to the specific dynamics of the moment (Moss, 2007).

#### **10.4.7 The “constructedness” of the text**

Neither of the Year 1 teachers in the study tackled the larger question of why the author wrote *The Colour of Home*, but in my brief discussion groups children made very sensible suggestions of reasons for authorship – that the story might be real, that the author might have been to the country in question, or merely that they might have wanted to write a story. In Year 3 only one child raised the question of why Hoffman wrote the book, broaching the idea of the “constructedness” of the text. Other children responded with suggestions such as a desire for fame, that the story was taken from direct experience, or that a television programme might have been a catalyst. Children also considered that the author might be aiming to highlight the experience of others, and communicate the effect of the refugee experience, in particular, what had happened in Somalia. Ideas flowed about the possible “message” of the book, but children needed more teacher support to view the text as authored, partial and arbitrary, as part of critical literacy.

Meeting the author in person was a high spot for Year 5, and an opportunity that the younger classes did not get to enjoy, understanding the “constructedness” of the text being so much easier when encountering the originator of the work. Children wanted to know about Naidoo's own life and process of writing, as did Year 3 in the Skype interview with Hoffman. However through Naidoo's talk they were also party to the interplay of author and their world in constructing text, with the chance to ask about motives for writing *The Other Side of Truth*, specific influences, and prior research. Children themselves referred to the power of literature as a transformative force, particularly in the winning article for the school newsletter which referred to “opening people's eyes and hearts” (see Chapter 9). Their thoughts on the

“message” of the book derived from both the “aesthetic” and the “efferent” reading - to show everyone how it feels to be a refugee, as a plea for kindness, and to learn not to bully, as this could happen to anyone, at any time. As already mentioned, they also felt that children might be empowered to declare themselves as refugees, and stand up for themselves in the face of bullying.

## **10.5 Reflections**

So, now to return to my overarching research question, which was the motivating force for carrying out this study:

### **What role can children’s literature play in understanding and validating the refugee experience?**

Firstly, with regards to the children in the study, I would suggest that literature dealing with challenging issues such as *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* can help children find out about their place in the world and the experiences of others around them. In all classes, reading these texts played a strong role in understanding and giving validity to the refugee experience, but not along a refugee/non-refugee binary, as expected. Post-modern identities are multiple, hybrid and fractured (Bhabha, 1994) (Hall, 1992), and children cannot be viewed simply as refugees or non-refugees, as they have complex backgrounds which affect their reaction to a text. For a whole range of children these books may be “windows” or “mirrors” on lives that have not until recently been represented in literature for the young. These young people may have already “read the world” before they come to the book (see Figure 28, p. 309), and their experiences may warrant validation in the classroom, although for some the recognition may be distressing. Nevertheless, such books “enable learners to recognize and understand their voices within a multitude of discourses in which they must deal” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 54). Furthermore, children who have not had similar experiences can come to understand more about the world through texts such

as these, or perhaps adjust their pre-existing vision of the world (see Figure 28 again). For some, these books have the added value of helping them to understand their own histories – that of their parents, their families, and through this, their own stories. For others it can help them decide what sort of person they want to choose to be, and what sort of social action they want to take in relation to others.

Secondly, with regards to the teacher, their role is vital and highly significant in introducing texts such as *The Colour of Home* and *The Other Side of Truth* in the classroom. As we have seen, teachers rarely select the text independently, as such choices are contingent on many other competing factors, but in undertaking to teach it, they are taking a brave step towards tackling a controversial and challenging area. In reading the book they invite children to “read the word and read the world.” By the dialogue they initiate, they can create greater or lesser engagement, and by the tasks and activities they plan, they can move children beyond merely recalling the story to developing their own “critical perception, interpretation and rewriting of what is read.” (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 36) Furthermore, the teacher may inspire praxis/social action, as a result of what is read, and although this is impossible to quantify, it is suffice to say that encouraging open-mindedness and a welcoming attitude is a start.

*“As teachers, we may be able to assess to some degree the meaning of a text in our classroom, yet we will never be fully aware of its long-lasting impact on our individual students, as they may ...reconnect with the themes of the novel in later life”* (Habib, 2008, p. 50).

However it is part of a teacher’s responsibility not to “other” refugee children in the reading, but to be aware and informed about the lives of the children in their class, in order to make a professional judgement about how these texts might affect them. As we have seen, teachers frequently underestimated the number of children from refugee backgrounds in their class, and may have been insensitive to their response. However, for refugee children, and those from a refugee or migrant background, the teacher may enable them to

recognise themselves in the word and enable them to deal more effectively with their world.

This study demonstrated how hard it is to understand the real nature of children's feelings about a text, and this may be why it is such an unreported area. Written responses were seen to be very different in character and content than discussion, so assuming what children write is what they think can be erroneous. It seems difficult to separate individual response from what is suggested by an "enabling adult". The extent to which children write from the heart or attempt to match teacher expectations is also contingent on wider agendas such as curriculum learning objectives, and pressures to improve written capabilities, both part of the "Standards" agenda which directs teachers to think about externally imposed summative targets such as Statutory Assessment Tests (SATs). As we have already seen, the classroom is not an independent space, isolated from broader agendas, but heavily influenced by political, cultural and historical forces in society, and current educational structures. What did emerge universally was a feeling that the teacher played a key role in the introduction of children's literature about the refugee experience in the primary classroom. Indeed CLPE write as a caveat at the top of their list of "Books Focusing on Identity, Belonging, Conflict, Migrant and Refugee Experiences", produced for Refugee Week,

*"As these books deal with strong and emotive themes, it's important that teachers, parents and carers share them with children" (CLPE, n.d.).*

Intended as a cautionary note, the message is slightly ambiguous, and could also mean that such powerful subject matter, in literary form, needs to be brought to the attention of children by an "enabling adult."

In conclusion, this discussion serves to underline the sagacious words of Meek (1987):

*"I am uneasy about our habit of speaking of 'the child' or even, as I so persistently do, of 'children' in the universalistic sense. There are boys*

*and girls; their histories, cultures, schooling and language are all different as are their psychological identities. Adults somehow believe that they can know children and know about them, but what they really know is that childhood is full of secrets, withdrawals, evasions and subversions which make this knowing impossible. We may 'know' a text better, in some senses, that we can ever know children as readers. To admit the partial nature of this knowledge is a help when looking at books for children. It helps to dispel the myths of 'suitability' when we offer books to the young." (ibid, p. 107)*

## Implications for the future

### Authors

This study demonstrates that authors of children’s literature about the refugee experience, in “giving voice to the voiceless”, have a substantial and dynamic responsibility towards their readers. They need to think of the “actual” readers of these texts – refugee children, those from a refugee background, as well as other migrants, and children who might have had related experiences, such as the death of a parent, or being bullied or subjected to racism. While acknowledging the possible trauma that asylum seekers have been through, it is important to present scenarios of resilience, so that child readers can be inspired with affirmative images, rather than patronising pity, or destructive self-pity. Authors also have an obligation to access feedback from a range of child readers. While visits to schools are of course not always possible, they are highly recommended for a variety of reasons. The benefits for children have been highlighted by the study, but it is also the case that writers themselves gain insight and satisfaction from meeting their readers in person and canvassing their opinions. Other ways need to be encouraged to develop the writer/reader connection further, perhaps virtually, by children accessing author’s websites, where details could be provided for the sharing of young people’s reviews of books, which would be of great value to a range of people, authors, teachers, and other children alike.

In the past, several authors tackling the refugee experience in children’s literature, had a “post-colonial” or migratory background, but very few were refugees themselves. More recently mainstream authors, such as Michael Morpurgo, in *Shadow* (2010), and Sarah Garland, in *Azzi In Between*, (2012) have been taking up the mantle and popularising the genre, with mixed effect. While such writers’ popularity, and even fame, can be seen as positive in raising the profile of refugee issues, those with no direct or indirect experience of the circumstances can easily misrepresent or trivialise the subject matter. Authors should be actively concerned with robust research, gaining familiarity with the context of their work, and thus pursuing a constant quest for

authenticity. Nevertheless, the fact that several eminent writers are beginning to engage with themes of flight, dislocation, shifting identity, resilience and transformation, that are all part of seeking sanctuary, suggest that this is an area of interest, of potentially high drama and tension, and of fascination for children. Moreover, it seems that the genre is perhaps beginning to enjoy marketing success, which might make us cynical about the motives for writing of those new to the field.

## Teachers

During the course of the research, my focus moved far more to the role of the teacher than I had expected, considering how they mediated the text and co-constructed meaning with children, but how little control they had over choosing texts for reading in class. The study showed that teachers lacked the confidence to bring their own life experiences to the text, and lacked the wherewithal to engage children in the same process. What also became clear was the importance of small group discussion, so that children can ask questions, develop ideas and critique the books they are reading, with all responses valued. This “collaborative” discourse (John, 2009) and co-construction of meaning from the text, through conversations between readers, adds depth to the reading experience, and an opportunity to engage with “critical literacy”, not just reader response. Such activity demonstrates to children that multiple interpretations are possible and valuable, and that the opportunity to change viewpoints through discussion is important. This is what “literature circles”, and what is now known as “guided reading” should be about (see Chapter 3), involving more discussion about the holistic meaning and purpose of the text, with an end to

*“bite-size chunks for short amounts of time, with an emphasis on filleting them for phonic or punctuation potential” (Arizpe & Styles, 2003, p. 239).*

As well as benefiting children, it can be seen that teachers in my study were frustrated by lack of access to this kind of discussion, to engage with pupils’ responses to the text, and generally to find out more about the children in their

classes. Part of this is the need to have awareness of and address sensitively the mixture of pride, embarrassment and emotional engagement felt by children when encountering a book rooted in their own country of origin.

More research is clearly needed into the genre I have identified, and more studies made of the impact of such texts in the classroom, involving observing, listening to, and reading children's responses. Meanwhile I would like to suggest a seven point framework for "the enabling adult" sharing a book involving controversial, sensitive or socio-political issues (for example about the refugee experience), to include responsible pedagogy and critical literacy. This would contain:

1. Awareness (prior to selection of the text) of children in the class who may have a connection with the themes of the book.
2. Sensitivity (when reading the text) to those who might have similar, and maybe unknown, circumstances, thereby creating a climate of trust within the classroom.
3. Researching the context (prior and during the reading) on the part of teachers and pupils, so that surrounding geo-political themes and issues can be made explicit.
4. Fostering inclusive dialogue (during and after the reading) which accepts many points of view, and does not "other" any of the "community of readers".
5. Providing variety in response, so that children of all ages, and varying linguistic and cognitive levels, can react to texts in ways that challenge an over-emphasis on writing.
6. Deconstructing the "constructedness" of the text, leading to an awareness of author standpoint, and overt or subliminal ideological influences of the wider world.

7. Encouraging social action that empowers children to carry the text forward and use it as an emancipatory, life-changing force, both in the classroom and in the world at large.

### **Initial and on-going support**

“The skills of analysis applied to different levels of a text should form part of teacher training in any society which hopes for adequate literacy” (Hollindale, 1988, p. 31). ITE courses need to introduce students to a wide range of children’s literature and how to teach it, involving critical literacy and dialogic pedagogy. They also need guidance on how to deal with controversial, violent and potentially distressing content in the classroom, and strategies to counter prejudice and challenge the unexpected reactions from “resistant readers”. Furthermore schools need to provide CPD that engages with on-going exposure to high quality children’s literature (such as the Power of Reading Project), and continually encourages teachers to tackle controversial issues raised through literature. Sources of inspiration in planning for strong textual engagement are available, and other agencies, such as the Refugee Week team and the Childline website, can stimulate ideas, but such resources need to be highlighted to help teachers amid pressing time constraints. Moreover teachers need refresher courses on how to promote critical literacy, not just reader response, and continually employ dialogic pedagogy, such as that suggested by Chambers (1991).

### **Educational policy makers**

Meanwhile it still needs to be recognized by all institutions involved in education, that the classroom is not an independent space, isolated from broader agendas, but heavily influenced by the political, cultural and historical forces of the wider world. There is a need to campaign for a more “literature-based”, rather than “literacy-based” curriculum, which encourages children to criticise the books we present them with in order to gain “textual power” (Scholes, 1985).

However with a government that seeks to control and anaesthetise the texts that children read, and which has introduced a new National Curriculum in England from September 2014 (DfE, 2013), with a strong Literacy focus on spelling, punctuation and grammar, and on word recognition before comprehension in reading, the future for “reading the world and the word” looks bleak. Gone are the inspirational quotes about the power of literature as an emancipatory force, previously included from the National Curriculum in England, 2000 (DfEE/QCA, 1999), from Lisa Jardine, an historian, and Ian McEwan, a famous author (given in full in Chapter 3), and we find only one hidden line of enthusiasm for literature: “Reading also feeds pupils’ imagination and opens up a treasure-house of wonder and joy for curious young minds” (DfE, 2013, p. 4).

I have presented an alternative view of the power of reading, not emphasising pleasure, wonder or joy. Literature can contain all these elements, but far more importantly this study shows that it can provide global awareness and connections, enable the reader to shape what sort of person they want to be, and help them understand their responsibility to others.

### **Further research**

This final section will consider the limitations of my thesis and include recommendations to take the study forward in several areas. Obviously in a case study of two books, the field is limited by the choice of books themselves. Would other texts about refugees, by different authors and with varied stories, have provoked the same responses? Then there is the choice of setting. Would the same texts read in other schools with a different pupil profile, perhaps in a predominantly mono-cultural, mono-lingual and mainly stable population, unused to migration, racism and wider refugee issues, have produced an alternative reading?

I chose to focus my study exclusively in the primary age range, as site of challenge both for teachers and children when encountering books about

refugees, in terms of the complexity of ideas presented, and the suitability of the subject matter for this age range. While Habib (2008) addressed *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah (2001) with secondary-aged children, there is a wealth of refugee texts written for this age group that have not been researched in the classroom context. Moreover, Habib's class did not contain any refugee children. This begs the question, how would older children, and especially those with refugee histories, respond to such subject matter? These three simple questions offer some possibilities for further interesting research.

As mentioned before, my focus is restricted to the UK context in terms of the books chosen, the authors interviewed, and the schools visited. A wider comparative study, such as that conducted by Arizpe et al (2014), which looked at immigrant children's responses to the wordless picturebook *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan (2006) in several cities, across various countries in three continents, offers a richness of situation and perspective. To take my initial question into other countries to find answers and responses which are conditioned by regional factors, and differing historical, cultural and social perspectives, would be an exciting proposition, and could consider implications for international educational contexts.

Sipe asks "What good is literary understanding?" (2008, p. 247) and suggests that more longitudinal research into how it develops over time, from the first years of school to the later years, is imperative (ibid, p. 242). This would also be a possible trajectory for my work to take, to ascertain whether children in my study were influenced in the long-term by the books they read and the ideas that were discussed in the classroom as a consequence of sharing those texts. Both Beverley Naidoo and Sophie, one of the teachers in my study, raised the question – does the reading of books such as *The Other Side of Truth* have a direct impact on students in the future, or is the relationship more subtle than that? Here we can look to Sipe, who helpfully answers his own question:

*“Literature thus allows us to perceive our lives, the lives of others, and our society in new ways, expanding our view of what is possible, serving as a catalyst to ignite our capacity to imagine a more just and equitable world”* (ibid, p. 247).

However, unless we engage in following young people through from their early encounters with books which might suggest “praxis” or “social action”, how can we better understand the possibilities that reading and sharing such texts might have?

Finally two newly developing areas of literary understanding are opening up rapidly, and would provide good lenses through which to undertake more research about the ramifications of sharing children’s books about refugees in the classroom. Critical multiculturalism has grown out of previous multicultural and anti-racist approaches by applying a blend of critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy, with the aim of giving “priority to structural analysis of unequal power relations, analysing the role of institutional inequities, including *but not necessarily limited to* (sic) racism” (May & Sleeter, 2010, p. 10). In this approach an attempt to understand the international imbalances in privilege, power and wealth that lead to global migration, and its regulation, would be higher on the agenda. While individual “social action” strategies for welcoming refugees into the classroom are of course necessary, grounding identity in its material context leads to more of an emphasis on challenging inequalities and taking collective action to bring about change. With reference specifically to “critical multicultural analysis of children’s literature”, Botelho and Rudman argue for a focus on “the examination of power as a factor in what gets written, illustrated, and published” (2009, p. 101), mirroring the institutional practices of our wider society. This angle would provide a useful perspective through which to expand my research in this area.

While understanding international power relations can seem an enormous challenge in the primary classroom, another emergent paradigm, that of cognitive literary criticism, lends itself naturally to research with young children. This developing area, which has its roots in reader response while interacting with new trajectories in neuroscience, looks at the relationship between fiction

and the mind, and suggests that reading fiction has an impact on children's maturing cognitive abilities (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer, 2013), understanding others' mental states (Kidd & Castano, 2013), and developing empathy. As Nikolajeva points out "empathy is not a natural capacity" (2012, p. 289), but by stimulating mirror neurons in our brains that activate emotionally charged memories, literature can develop a range of feelings in children, all of which "suggests a neurological basis for the value of reading: it provides a way of helping us understand other human beings" (ibid).

Nikolajeva calls for other "scholars who work with books and children to test the ideas developed here" (ibid, p. 290), and a more empirical study could investigate the capacity of children's books about refugees to generate empathy, as well as the possibility of stimulating emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, guilt, and love (all referred to by Nikolajeva), through an affective response by children who have lived experiences similar to those depicted in the books. However this leads us full circle back to a critique of reader response and individual perspectives, which postulate that empathy is not enough, and pity discourses can lead to non-action. Perhaps the way forward is to utilise both critical multiculturalism and cognitive theories as a useful counterpoint from which to examine the many-faceted options offered in further studies of children's literature about refugees, while retaining an idea that resonates especially strongly with me:

*"Solidarity, quite distinct from sympathy, is the recognition of common interest: 'your struggle is our struggle'"* (Yandell, 2008, p. 39).

## Appendix 1: List of Children's Literature about Refugees

	Author	Date	Title	Publisher	Place
1.	Ahmedi, F.	2005	<i>The Story of My Life</i>	Simon & Schuster	NY, USA
2.	Aliki	1998	<i>Marianthe's Story: Painted Words and Spoken Memories</i>	Greenwillow	NY, USA
3.	Almond, D.	2008	<i>Jackdaw Summer</i>	Hodder	London, UK
4.	Al-Windawi, T.	2004	<i>Thura's Diary</i>	Puffin	London, UK
5.	Aman	1994	<i>Story of a Somali Girl</i>	Bloomsbury	London, UK
6.	Anderson, R.	1984	<i>The War Orphan</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
7.	Anderson, R.	2000	<i>Warlands</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
8.	Anderson, R.	2011	<i>Asylum</i>	Hodder	London, UK
9.	Applegate, K.	2007	<i>Home of the Brave</i>	Square Fish	NY, USA
10.	Argueta, J.	2003	<i>Xochitl and the Flowers</i>	Children's Books Press	San Fran, CA, USA
11.	Argueta, J.	2007	<i>Alfredito Flies Home</i>	Groundwood	Toronto, Can
12.	Armstrong, J.	2002	<i>Shattered: Stories of Children and War</i>	Knopf	NY, USA
13.	Ashley, B.	1990	<i>Boat Girl</i>	Harcourt	San Diego, CA, USA
14.	Ashley, B.	1999	<i>Little Soldier</i>	Orchard	London, UK
15.	Avery, T.	2011	<i>Too Much Trouble</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
16.	Barakat, I.	2007	<i>Tasting the Sky</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
17.	Bawden, N.	1969	<i>The Runaway Summer</i>	1969, Lippincott 1972, Puffin	Phil, PA, USA Middx, UK
18.	Beah, I.	2007	<i>A Long Way Gone</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
19.	Beckwith, K.	2005	<i>Playing War</i>	Tilbury House	ME, USA
20.	Bergman, T. trans: Swirsky, M.	1988 1991	<i>Along the Tracks</i>	Schocken Publishing Houghton Mifflin	Tel Aviv, Israel NY, USA
21.	Bilkuei, C.	2008	<i>Cola's Story</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
22.	Bondoux, A-L.	2010	<i>A Time of Miracles</i>	Random House	NY, USA

23.	Bradman, T. (ed)	2007	<i>Give Me Shelter</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
24.	Brahmachari, S.	2011	<i>Artichoke Hearts</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
25.	Bunting, E.	1988	<i>How many days to America?</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
26.	Bunting, E.	2001	<i>Gleam and Glow</i>	Harcourt	San Diego, CA, USA
27.	Bunting, E.	2006	<i>One Green Apple</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
28.	Calcines, E. F.	2009	<i>Leaving Glorytown</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
29.	Carmi, D.	2000	<i>Samir and Yonatan</i>	Arthur A. Levine	NY, USA
30.	Cavouras, C.	2007	<i>Rainbow Bird</i>	Wakefield Press	Adelaide, S. Aus
31.	Cha, D.	1996	<i>Dia's Story Cloth</i>	Lee & Low	NY, USA
32.	Coates, J.	2010	<i>A Hare in the Elephant's Trunk</i>	Red Deer Press	Ontario, Can
33.	Cohen, S.	2005	<i>Mai Ya's Long Journey</i>	Wisconsin Historical Society Press	Madison, WI, USA
34.	Cooney, C.	2007	<i>Diamonds in the Shadow</i>	Waterbrook Press	Colorado Springs, CO, USA
35.	Cornwell, N.	2006	<i>Christophe's Story</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
36.	Cornwell, N.	2011	<i>Armel's Revenge</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
37.	Cottrell Boyce, F.	2011	<i>The Unforgotten Coat</i>	Walker	London, UK
38.	Crew, L.	1989	<i>Children of the River</i>	Delacourt	NY, USA
39.	Cross, G.	2010	<i>Where I Belong</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
40.	Cross, G.	2013	<i>After Tomorrow</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
41.	Davidow, S.	1998	<i>The Red Shadow</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
42.	Dechian, S., Millar, H. & Sallis, E. (eds)	2004	<i>Dark Dreams: Australian Refugee Stories by young writers aged 11-20 years</i>	Wakefield Press	Adelaide, S. Aus
43.	De Groen, E. trans: Compton, P.	1997	<i>No Roof in Bosnia</i>	Spindlewood	
44.	Deitz Shea, P.	1995	<i>The Whispering Cloth</i>	Boyds Mill Press	Homesdale, PA, USA
45.	Deitz Shea, P.	2003	<i>Tangled Threads</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
46.	Deitz Shea, P.	2010	<i>Abe in Arms</i>	PM Press	Oakland, CA, USA

47.	Dhondy, F.	2000	<i>Run</i>	Bloomsbury	London, UK
48.	Diaz Gonzalez, C.	2011	<i>The Red Umbrella</i>	Yearling	NY, USA
49.	Diaz Gonzalez, C.	2012	<i>A Thunderous Whisper</i>	Yearling	NY, USA
50.	Dickenson	1992	<i>A K</i>	Delacorte	NY, USA
51.	Do, A. & S.	2011	<i>The Little Refugee</i>	Allen & Unwin	Sydney, NSW, Aus
52.	Dunmore, H.	1996	<i>Amina's Blanket</i>	Egmont	London, UK
53.	Durant, A.	2009	<i>Game Boy Galactic</i>	Barrington Stoke	Edinburgh, UK
54.	Ellis, D.	2001	<i>The Breadwinner</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
55.	Ellis, D.	2002	<i>Parvana's Journey</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
56.	Ellis, D.	2004	<i>Mud City</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
57.	Ellis, D.	2004	<i>Three Wishes: Palestinian and Israeli Children Speak</i>	Groundwood	Toronto, Can
58.	Ellis, D.	2009	<i>Children of War: Voices of Iraqi Refugees</i>	Groundwood	Toronto, Can, & Berkeley, CA, USA
59.	Ellis, D.	2010	<i>No Safe Place</i>	Groundwood	Toronto, Can
60.	Engle, M.	2009	<i>Tropical Secrets</i>	Henry Holt	NY, USA
61.	Farish, T.	2012	<i>The Good Braider</i>	Marshall Cavendish	NY, USA
62.	Filipović, Z.	1994	<i>Zlata's Diary</i>	Viking	London, UK
63.	Fitzgerald, W.	2010	<i>The Go-Away Bird</i>	HarperCollins	London, UK
64.	Flores-Galbis, E. & Chaghatzbanian, S.	2010	<i>90 Miles to Havana</i>	Roaring Brook Press	NY, USA
65.	Francis, V	1999	<i>Letters to Grandma Grace</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
66.	Frank, A. (1953)	1953	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i>	Pan	London, UK
67.	Friedman, D.	2006	<i>Escaping into the Night</i>	Simon & Schuster	London, UK
68.	Garay, L.	1997	<i>The Long Road</i>	Tundra	Toronto, Can
69.	Garland, S.	1993	<i>Lotus Seed</i>	Harcourt	San Diego, CA, USA
70.	Garland, S.	2012	<i>Azzi In Between</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
71.	Geda, F.	2010	<i>In the Sea There Are Crocodiles</i>	Doubleday	NY, USA
72.	Geras, A.	1997	<i>A Candle in the Dark</i>	A & C Black	London, UK

73.	Gerdner, L. & Langford, S.	2008	<i>Grandfather's Story Cloth</i>	Shen's Books, Lee & Low	NY, USA
74.	Gervay, S.	2012	<i>Ships in the Fields</i>	Ford Street Publishing	Abbotsford, Vic, Aus
75.	Gibbons, A.	1999	<i>A Fight to Belong</i>	Save the Children	London, UK
76.	Gibbons, A.	2003	<i>The Dark Beneath</i>	Orion	London, UK
77.	Gibbons, A.	2011	<i>An Act of Love</i>	Orion	London, UK
78.	Gleeson, L.	2008	<i>Mahtab's Story</i>	Allen & Unwin	Sydney, NSW, Aus
79.	Gleitzman, M.	2002	<i>Boy Overboard</i>	Penguin	Camberwell, Vic, Aus
80.	Gleitzman, M.	2004	<i>Girl Underground</i>	Penguin	Camberwell, Vic, Aus
81.	Golabek, M. & Cohen, L.	2002	<i>The Children of Willesden Lane</i>	Warner	NY, USA
82.	Goode, K.	1997	<i>Jumping to Heaven</i>	Wakefield Press	Adelaide, S. Aus
83.	Graber, J.	2009	<i>Muktar and the Camels</i>	Henry Holt	NY, USA
84.	Grant, N.		<i>The Ink Bridge</i>	Allen & Unwin	Sydney, NSW, Aus
85.	Greder, A.	2008	<i>The Island</i>	Allen & Unwin, 2002 -	Crows Nest, Aus Germany
86.	Halahmy, M.	2011	<i>Hidden</i>	Gardners	Eastbourne, UK
87.	Halilbegovich, N.	2008	<i>My Childhood Under Fire</i>	Kids Can Press	Toronto, Can
88.	Hampton, M. J.	2001	<i>The Cat From Kosovo</i>	Nimbus Publishing	Halifax, Nova Scotia, Can
89.	Harris, C. & Ong, H.	1994	<i>The Silver Path</i>	Boyds Mills Press	Honesdale, PA, USA
90.	Hawke, R.	2004	<i>Soraya the Storyteller</i>	Lothian	Melbourne, Aus
91.	Heffernan, J.	2001	<i>My Dog</i>	Margaret Hamilton	Blackheath, NSW, Aus
92.	Hest, A.	2003	<i>When Amy Came Across the Sea</i>	Candlewick	Somerville, MA, USA
93.	Hiçyilmaz, G.	1997	<i>And The Stars Were Gold</i>	Orion	London, UK
94.	Hiçyilmaz, G.	1998	<i>Smiling for Strangers</i>	Orion	London, UK
95.	Hiçyilmaz, G.	2000	<i>The Girl in Red</i>	Orion	London, UK
96.	Ho, M.	1991	<i>The Clay Marble</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
97.	Hoffman, M.	2002	<i>The Colour of Home</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK

98.	Holliday, L. (ed)	1998	<i>Children of Israel, Children of Palestine: Our Own True Stories</i>	Pocket Books	NY, USA
99.	Holm, A.	1963	<i>I Am David</i>	Gyldendal 1965, Methuen	Copenhagen, Den London, UK
100.	Jal, D., & Jacobs, L.	2012	<i>David's Journey</i>	Khor Wakow School	Sioux Falls, SD, USA
101.	Johnston, T.	2008	<i>Voice from Afar: Poems of Peace</i>	Holiday House	NY, USA
102.	Kadohata, C.	2006	<i>Weedflower</i>	Simon & Schuster	London, UK
103.	Keidel, L.	1979	<i>Caught in the Crossfire</i>	Herald	Scottsdale, PA, USA
104.	Kemp, C.	1999	<i>My Brother is a Soldier</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
105.	Kerr, J.	1971	<i>When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit</i>	Collins	London, UK
106.	Kerz, A.	2010	<i>The Gnome's Eye</i>	Orca	Custer, WA, USA
107.	Khan, R.	1998	<i>The Roses in My Carpets</i>	Holiday House	NY, USA
108.	Kidd, D.	1991	<i>Onion Tears</i>	William Collins	Aus
109.	Kiely, K.	2005	<i>A Horse Called El Dorado</i>	O'Brien Press	Dublin, Ire
110.	Kilborn, S.	1999	<i>Leaving Vietnam: The Journey of Tuan Ngo, a Boat Boy.</i>	Simon & Schuster	NY, USA
111.	Koralek, J.	2004	<i>War Games</i>	Egmont Books	London, UK
112.	Kramer, L.	1998	<i>Cry Baby</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
113.	Krishnaswami, U.	2003	<i>Chachaji's Cup</i>	Children's Book Press	NY, USA
114.	Kurtz, J.	2000	<i>Faraway Home</i>	Gulliver	AK, USA
115.	Lai, T.	2011	<i>Inside Out &amp; Back Again</i>	HarperCollins	NY, USA
116.	Lainez, R. C.	2004	<i>Waiting for Papa</i>	Pinata	El Paso, TX, USA
117.	Lainez, R. C.	2010	<i>My Shoes and I</i>	Boyds Mills	Honesdale, PA, USA
118.	Laird, E.	1991	<i>Kiss the Dust</i>	Heineman	London, UK
119.	Laird, E.	1997	<i>On the Run</i>	Mammoth	London, UK
120.	Laird, E.	2003	<i>A Little Piece of Ground</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
121.	Landowne, Y.	2004	<i>Sélavi: A Haitian Story of Hope</i>	Cinco Puntos Press	El Paso, TX, USA
122.	Landowne, Y.	2010	<i>Mali Under the Night Sky: A Lao Story of Home</i>	Cinco Puntos Press	El Paso, TX, USA

123.	Latifa	2002	<i>My Forbidden Face</i>	Virago	London, UK
124.	Layburn, J.	2008	<i>Ghostscape</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
125.	Levitin, S.	1970	<i>Journey to America</i>	Atheneum	NY, USA
126.	Levy, D.	2010	<i>The Year of Goodbyes</i>	Disney-Hyperion	NY, USA
127.	Lingard, J.	1989	<i>Tug of War</i>	Lodestar	London, UK
128.	Lobel, A.	1998 2008	<i>No Pretty Pictures: A Child of War</i>	HarperCollins	NY, USA
129.	Lofthouse, L.	2007	<i>Ziba Came on a Boat</i>	Viking	Melbourne, Aus
130.	Lombard, J.	2006	<i>Drita, My Homegirl</i>	Putman's Sons	NY, USA
131.	Lord, M.	2008	<i>A Song for Cambodia</i>	Lee & Low	NY, USA
132.	Lottridge, C. B.	2010	<i>Home Is Beyond the Mountains</i>	Groundwood Books	Toronto, Can
133.	Lowry, L.	1989	<i>Number the Stars</i>	HarperCollins	London, UK
134.	Manivong, L.	2010	<i>Escaping the Tiger</i>	HarperCollins	NY, USA
135.	Marin, G.	2007	<i>A True Person</i>	New Frontier Publishing	Sydney, NSW, Aus
136.	Marsden, J.	2008	<i>Home and Away</i>	Lothian	Melbourne, Aus
137.	Martin, S.	1999	<i>On the Other Side of the Hill</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
138.	Martin, S.	1998	<i>The Lost Children</i>	Macmillan	London, UK
139.	Matthews, L.	2003	<i>Fish</i>	Hodder	London, UK
140.	Mattingley, C.	1993	<i>No Gun for Asmir</i>	Penguin	London, UK
141.	MacPhail, C.	2007	<i>Under the Skin</i>	Barrington Stoke	Edinburgh, UK
142.	MacPhail, C.	2013	<i>Mosi's War</i>	Bloomsbury	London, UK
143.	McDonnell, V.	2002	<i>Out of the Flames</i>	O'Brien Press	Dublin, Ire
144.	McKay, L.	1998	<i>Journey Home</i>	Lee & Low	NY, USA
145.	Mead, A.	1996	<i>Adem's Cross</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
146.	Mead, A.	2001	<i>Girl of Kosovo</i>	Random House	NY, USA
147.	Mead, A.	2003	<i>Year of No Rain</i>	Random House	NY, USA
148.	Mikaelsen, B.	2002	<i>Red Midnight</i>	HarperCollins	NY, USA
149.	Miller, D.	2003	<i>Refugees</i>	Lothian	Melbourne, Aus

150.	Miller-Lachmann, L.	2009	<i>Gringolandia</i>	Curbstone Press	Evanston, IL, USA
151.	Mitchell, P.	2004	<i>Petar's Song</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
152.	Mobbin-Udin, A.	2007	<i>The Best Eid Ever</i>	Boyds Mills Press	Honesdale, PA, USA
153.	Mochizuki, K.	1997	<i>Passage to Freedom: The Sugihara Story</i>	Lee & Low	NY, USA
154.	Molnar, H. L.	2010	<i>Under a Red Sky</i>	Donnelley & Sons	Harrisonburg, VI, USA
155.	Morgan, M.	2008	<i>Night Flight</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
156.	Morley, B.	2009	<i>The Silence Seeker</i>	Tamarind	London, UK
157.	Morpurgo, M.	1990	<i>Waiting for Anya</i>	Heinemann	London, UK
158.	Morpurgo, M.	2010	<i>Shadow</i>	HarperCollins	London, UK
159.	Munsch, R.	1995	<i>From Far Away</i>	Annick Press	Buffalo, NY, USA
160.	Naidoo, B.	2000	<i>The Other Side of Truth</i>	Penguin	London, UK
161.	Naidoo, B.	2004	<i>Web of Lies</i>	Penguin	London, UK
162.	Naidoo, B. (ed).	2004	<i>Making it Home</i>	Puffin	London, UK
163.	Nanji, S.	2008	<i>Child of Dandelions</i>	Boyds Mills Press	Honesdale, PA, USA
164.	Nye, N. S.	1994	<i>Sitti's Secrets</i>	Four Winds Press	NY, USA
165.	Osman, A. Y.	1996	<i>In the Name of Our Fathers</i>	Haan Publishing	Svedala, Swe
166.	Park, F. & Park G.	1998	<i>My Freedom Trip: A Child's Escape from North Korea</i>	Boyds Mills Press	Honesdale, PA, USA
167.	Park, L. S.	2010	<i>A Long Walk to Water</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
168.	Partridge, E.	2011	<i>Dogtag Summer</i>	Bloomsbury	NY, USA
169.	Paterson, K.	2009	<i>The Day of the Pelican</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
170.	Pellegrino, M.	2009	<i>Journey of Dreams</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
171.	Perkins, M.	2010	<i>Bamboo People</i>	Charlesbridge	Watertown, MA, USA
172.	Pirotta, S.	2001	<i>The Best Prize of All</i>	Hodder	London, UK
173.	Pressler, M.	2001	<i>Malka</i>	Beltz 2002 - Picador	Weinheim, Germ London, UK
174.	Powers, J. L.	2012	<i>That Mad Game</i>	Cinco Puntos Press	El Paso, TX, USA

175.	Refugee Council	1998	<i>Why do they have to fight?</i>	Refugee Council	London, UK
176.	Refugee Trauma Recovery	2010	<i>Beyond the Dark Journey</i>	Refugees as Survivors Trust	Wellington, NZ
177.	Riordan, J.	2005	<i>Escape From War</i>	Kingfisher	London, UK
178.	Robert, N.	2008	<i>From Somalia With Love</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
179.	Robinson, A.	2009	<i>Hamzat's Journey</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
180.	Robinson, A.	2010	<i>Meltem's Journey</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
181.	Robinson, A. & Young, A.	2008	<i>Gervelie's Journey</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
182.	Robinson, A. & Young, A.	2009	<i>Mohammed's Journey</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
183.	Ross, S.	2001	<i>Only a Matter of Time</i>	Hodder	London, UK
184.	Rosselson, L.	2002	<i>Home is a Place Called Nowhere</i>	OUP	Oxford, UK
185.	Rosenberg, L.	1999	<i>The Silence in the Mountains</i>	Orchard	NY, USA
186.	Rutter, J.	1998	<i>Why Do They Have To Fight?</i>	Oxfam	London, UK
187.	Satrapi, M.	2003	<i>Persepolis</i>	Jonathan Cape	London, UK
188.	Satrapi, M.	2004	<i>Persepolis 2</i>	Pantheon	NY, USA
189.	Say, K. P.	2011	<i>Karenni Strength</i>	Yates Publishing	Omaha, NE, USA
190.	Schmidt, G.	2008	<i>Trouble</i>	Clarion	NY, USA
191.	Schumer Chapman, F.	2010	<i>Is it night or day?</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
192.	Senzai, N. H.	2010	<i>Shooting Kabul</i>	Simon & Schuster	NY, USA
193.	Sepetys, P.	2011	<i>Between Shades of Gray</i>	Philomel	NY, USA
194.	Serraillier, I.	1956	<i>The Silver Sword</i>	Jonathan Cape	London, UK
195.	Shah, S. M.	2010	<i>Peace in my World</i>	Tate Publishing	Mustang, OK, USA
196.	Shoveller, H.	2006	<i>Ryan and Jimmy</i>	Kids Can Press	Toronto, Can
197.	Shulevitz, U.	2008	<i>How I Learned Geography</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA
198.	Skrypuch, M. F.	2012	<i>Last Airlift</i>	Pajama Press	Ontario, Can
199.	Smith, I.	2010	<i>Half Spoon of Rice</i>	East West Discovery Press	Manhattan Beach, CA, USA
200.	Strachan, I.	1991	<i>Journey of 1000 miles</i>	Mammoth	London, UK
201.	Staples, S. F.	2005	<i>Under the Persimmon Tree</i>	Farrar, Straus & Giroux	NY, USA

202.	Swindells, R.	2004	<i>Ruby Tanya</i>	Doubleday	London, UK
203.	Szymanik, M.	2013	<i>A Winter's Day in 1939</i>	Scholastic	Auckland, NZ
204.	Tan, S.	2007	<i>The Arrival</i>	Arthur A. Levine	NY, USA
205.	Thor, A. trans: Schenck, L.	1996	<i>A Faraway Island</i>	Bonnier Carlson 2009 – Random House	Stockholm, Swe NY, USA
206.	Thor, A. trans: Schenck, L.	1997	<i>The Lily Pond</i>	Bonnier Carlson 2011 – Random House	Stockholm, Swe NY, USA
207.	Turner, B.	2003	<i>One Small Suitcase</i>	Puffin	London, UK
208.	Unicef	2003	<i>Lines in the Sand</i>	Frances Lincoln	London, UK
209.	Walgren, J.	1998	<i>The Lost Boys of Natinga</i>	Houghton Mifflin	NY, USA
210.	Walker, B.	2011	<i>A Safe Place to Live</i>	Ashburton	Vic, AUS
211.	Watkins, Y.	1994	<i>My Brother, My Sister, and I</i>	Aladdin	NY, USA
212.	Watts, I.	1998	<i>Goodbye Marianne</i>	Tundra	Toronto, Can
213.	Whelan, G.	1992	<i>Goodbye, Vietnam</i>	Yearling	NY, USA
214.	Williams, M.	2005	<i>Brothers in Hope</i>	Lee & Low	NY, USA
215.	Williams, M.	2011	<i>Now is the Time for Running</i>	Little, Brown Books	NY, USA
216.	Williams, K. & Mohammed, K.	2007	<i>Four Feet, Two Sandals</i>	Eerdmans	Grand Rapids, MI, USA
217.	Williams, K. & Mohammed, K.	2009	<i>My Name is Sangoel</i>	Eerdmans	Grand Rapids, MI, USA
218.	Wilkes, S.	1994	<i>One Day We Had to Run!</i>	Evans Bros	London, UK
219.	Wilson, L.	2005	<i>Last train from Kummersdorf</i>	Faber	London, UK
220.	Woodruff, E.	1999	<i>The Memory Coat</i>	Scholastic	NY, USA
221.	Zephaniah, B.	2001	<i>Refugee Boy</i>	Bloomsbury	London, UK
222.	Zoya with Follain, J.	2002	<i>Zoya's Story: An Afghan Woman's Struggle for Freedom</i>	HarperCollins	NY, USA

This list has been compiled with reference to the following sources:

Australian Refugee Week Resources (n.d.) -

[http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012\\_RW\\_ResourceKit\\_Ch5.pdf](http://www.refugeeweek.org.au/resources/2012_RW_ResourceKit_Ch5.pdf)

Coughlan, M. (2010) Caught up in conflict: refugee stories about and for young people -

<http://www.papertigers.org/personalViews/archiveViews/MCoughlan4.html>

Coughlan, M. (2012) Escaping Conflict, Seeking Peace: Picture books that related refugee stories, and their importance -

<http://www.papertigers.org/personalViews/archiveViews/MCoughlan9.html>

Gangi, J. (2006) Annotated Children's Literature Bibliography on the Refugee Experience -

<http://faculty.mville.edu/gangji/refugee.htm>

Mason, E. (2009) Collecting Children's Refugee Literature: A Bibliography -

<http://forcedmigrationguide.pbworks.com/w/file/attach/68847486/ChildrensRefugeeLiteratureBibliogr-2013.pdf>

Refugee Week (2015) Fiction Resources –

<http://www.refugeeweek.org.uk/Info-Centre/Resources-on-Refugees/fiction-resources>

Toft, Z. (2015) Recent children's books about the refugee experience –

<http://www.playingbythebook.net/2013/06/19/refugee-week-recent-childrens-books-about-the-refugee-experience/>

University of Strathclyde Children's Literature Resources: Refugees (n.d.) -

<http://www.strath.ac.uk/library/resources/subjecthelp/childliteratureresources/childrensbookliststhemerefugees/>

## Appendix 2: Data collection log by date

Date	Type of data	Year Group	Name/ School
15.03.07	Author interview	n/a	Beverley Naidoo
14.04.07	Author interview	n/a	Mary Hoffman
13.06.09	Refugee Education Expert interview	n/a	Jill Rutter
09.11.09	Class visit	Year 1	School A
31.08.10	Teacher interview	Year 1	April
06.10.10	Teacher interview	Year 3	Simon
17.06.11	Class visit 1	Year 1	School B
17.06.11	Discussion Group 1	Year 1	School B
01.07.11	Class visit 2	Year 1	School B
01.07.11	Discussion Group 2	Year 1	School B
23.11.11	Teacher interview	Year 1	Nerys
09.05.12	Class visit 1	Year 3	School A
11.05.12	Class visit 2	Year 3	School A
14.05.12	Class visit 3	Year 3	School A
14.05.12	Class visit 1	Year 5, Class X	School A
15.05.12	Class visit 4	Year 3	School A
15.05.12	Class visit 2	Year 5, Class X	School A
16.05.12	Class visit 3	Year 5, Class X	School A
18.05.12	Class visit 5	Year 3	School A
18.05.12	Discussion Group 1	Year 3	School A
18.05.12	Discussion Group 2	Year 3	School A
18.05.12	Class visit 1	Year 5, Class Y	School A
21.05.12	Class visit 6	Year 3	School A
21.05.12	Pupil interview	Year 3	Asma
21.05.12	Pupil interview	Year 3	Kadiye
25.05.12	Class visit 7	Year 3	School A
25.05.12	Author's assembly, Class visit 4 & 2	Year 5, Class X & Y	School A
29.05.12	Class visit 3	Year 5, Class Y	School A
12.06.12	Class visit 4	Year 5, Class Y	School A
14.06.12	Discussion Group 1a	Year 5, Class X	School A
14.06.12	Discussion Group 2a	Year 5, Class X	School A
19.06.12	Discussion Group 3	Year 5, Class Y	School A
19.06.12	Discussion Group 4	Year 5, Class Y	School A
19.06.12	Discussion Group 5	Year 5, Class Y	School A
20.06.12	Class visit 5	Year 5, Class X	School A
29.06.12	Class visit 6	Year 5, Class X	School A
29.06.12	Discussion Group 1b	Year 5, Class X	School A
29.06.12	Discussion Group 2b	Year 5, Class X	School A
16.07.12	Teacher interview	Year 5, Class X	Sophie
16.07.12	Teacher interview	Year 5, Class Y	Violet
17.07.12	Teacher interview	Year 3	Charlie

## Appendix 3: Ethnicities and Languages spoken at School A & School B

(taken from school database, given by parents on admission)

### Ethnicities, School A & B

Ethnicity Description	School A Sept 2012	School B Jan 2013
Any Other Ethnic Group	19	12
Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi	10	4
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1	5
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1	12
Black or Black British – Any Other Black Background	21	20
Black or Black British - Caribbean	48	52
Chinese	29	30
Information Not Yet Obtained	0	1
Mixed/Dual Background – Any Other Mixed Background	18	23
Mixed/Dual Background – White and Asian	3	10
Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black African	12	10
Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean	25	29
Other Asian	11	14
Other Black African	139	93
Refused	1	1
Somali	20	27
Sri Lankan Tamil	3	6
Turkish/Turkish Cypriot	2	7
Vietnamese	19	3
White - British	24	57
White - Irish	1	0
White European	29	39
White Other	6	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>465</b>

## Languages spoken at School A, September 2012

Language	Total Pupils	Language	Total Pupils
Akan (Fante)	1	Kikongo	1
Akan (Twi/Asante)	11	Kikuyu/Gikuyu	1
Albanian/Shqip	8	Krio	4
Amharic	1	Kurdish	5
Arabic (Algeria)	2	Lingala	1
Arabic (Any Other)	2	Lithuanian	2
Arabic (Yemen)	1	Luganda	3
Arabic (Morocco)	1	Other Language	1
Believed to be Other than English	1	Other than English	2
Bengali (Any Other)	11	Pashto/Pakhto	2
Bulgarian	5	Persian/Farsi	5
Chichewa/Nyanja	1	Polish	8
Chinese (Any Other)	3	Portuguese (Any Other)	14
Chinese (Cantonese)	7	Portuguese (Brazil)	1
Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua)	19	Romanian	1
Dutch	5	Slovak	2
Edo/Bini	5	Somali	20
English	155	Spanish	16
Ewe	1	Swahili/Kiswahili	2
French	33	Tagalog/Filipino	1
Fula/Fulfulde-Pulaar	1	Tamil	3
Ga	1	Turkish	2
German	2	Ukrainian	1
Hausa	1	Urdu	2
Hindi	1	Vietnamese	19
Igbo	9	Yoruba	34
Italian	2	<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>442</b>

### Languages spoken at School B, January, 2013

Language	Total Pupils	Language	Total Pupils
Akan (Twi/Asante)	2	Kurdish	4
Albanian/Shqip	17	Lingala	2
Arabic (Algeria)	4	Lithuanian	2
Arabic (Any Other)	1	Luganda	5
Arabic (Iraq)	2	Persian/Farsi	13
Arabic (Morocco)	1	Polish	6
Arabic (Yemen)	1	Portuguese (Any Other)	3
Bengali (Any Other)	4	Portuguese (Brazil)	1
Chinese (Cantonese)	14	Romanian	2
Chinese (Mandarin/Putonghua)	16	Russian	4
Dutch	1	Somali	24
Edo/Bini	2	Spanish	11
English	224	Swahili	7
French	25	Swedish	1
Fula/Fulfulde-Pulaar	1	Tagalog/Filipino	1
German	1	Tamil	6
Gujarati	1	Thai	1
Hausa	1	Turkish	7
Hindi	4	Urdu	11
Igbo	1	Urhobo-Isoko	3
Italian	2	Vietnamese	2
Itsekiri	1	Visayan/Bisaya	2
Krio	2	Yoruba	19
		<b>Grand Totals</b>	<b>465</b>

## Appendix 4: Country of Origin, First Language and Ethnicity of Classes in School A & B

(taken from school database, given by parents on admission)

*NB: Those italicised might possibly come from a refugee background, or been refugees themselves*

### Year 1, School A

	Country of Origin	First Language	Ethnicity
1		English	Other Black African
2		<i>Albanian/Shqip</i>	<i>White European</i>
3		<i>Albanian/Shqip</i>	<i>White European</i>
4		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
5		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
6		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
7		Akan (Fante)	Other Black African
8	Jamaica	English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
9		English	Mixed/Dual Background – Any Other Mixed Background
10		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
11		Chinese (Cantonese)	Chinese
12		English	White - British
13		<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
14		Bengali (Any Other)	Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
15		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
16		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
17		English	Other Black African
18		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
19		Akan (Twi/Asante)	Other Black African
20		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
21		<i>Pashto/Pakhto</i>	<i>Other Asian</i>
22	Philippines	English	Other Asian
23		Chinese (Mandarin)	Chinese
24		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
25	Nigeria	English	Other Black African
26		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White and Black African
27		<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Chinese</i>
28		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
29	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Mixed/Dual Background – White and Asian</i>

## Year 1, School B

	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
1		Sinhala	Other Asian
2	Pakistan	Urdu	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
3		<i>Albanian</i>	<i>White European</i>
4		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White and Black Caribbean
5	<i>Sri Lanka</i>	<i>Tamil</i>	<i>Sri Lankan Tamil</i>
6	<i>Kosovo</i>	<i>Albanian/Shqip</i>	<i>White European</i>
7	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
8		English	Any Other Ethnic Group
9		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
10		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
11	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
12		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
13	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
14	Lithuania	Lithuanian	White European
15		English	Other Black African
16		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
17	China	Cantonese	Chinese
18		Akan	Other Black African
19	<i>Romania</i>	<i>Romanian</i>	<i>White European</i>
20	<i>Colombia</i>	<i>Spanish</i>	<i>Any Other Ethnic Group</i>
21	<i>Uganda</i>	<i>Luganda</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
22		English	White European
23	India	Hindu	Asian or Asian British - Indian
24		English	Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black Caribbean
25		English	White European
26		English	White - British
27		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
28		English	White - British
29		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
30		English	White - British

### Year 3, School A

	Country of Origin	First Language	Ethnicity
1		Akan (Twi/Asante)	Other Black African
2	<i>Somalia</i>	<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
3		Yoruba	Other Black African
4		French	Black or Black British – Any Other Black Background
5		English	Mixed/Dual Background – Any Other Black Background
6	<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Bulgarian</i>	<i>White European</i>
7		Arabic	Any Other Ethnic Group
8	Nigeria	Yoruba	Other Black African
9		English	Mixed/Dual Background – Any Other Mixed Background
10		Portuguese	Mixed/Dual Background – Any Other Mixed Background
11		English	Black or Black British – Caribbean
12	<i>Afghanistan</i>	<i>Urdu</i>	<i>Other Asian</i>
13	USA	English	Black or Black British – Any Other Black Background
14	Bangladesh	Bengali	Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
15		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
16	Poland	Polish	White European
17		<i>French</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
18		English	White British
19		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
20		<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
21		Yoruba	Black or Black British – Any Other Black Background
22	Slovakia	Slovak	White European
23		English	Chinese
24		English	Other Asian
25	<i>Ivory Coast</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
26		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White British/Black African
27	<i>Kosovo</i>	<i>Albanian/Shqip</i>	<i>White European</i>
28		<i>Portuguese</i>	<i>Mixed/Dual Background – White and Black African</i>
29		Bengali	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

**Year 5, Class X, School A**

	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
1		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
2	Ireland	English	Other Black African
3	<i>Ivory Coast</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
4	Nigeria	Igbo	Other Black African
5	USA	Yoruba	Other Black African
6		<i>French</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
7	<i>Portugal</i>	<i>Portuguese (Any Other)</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
8		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
9	<i>Romania</i>	<i>Romanian</i>	<i>White European</i>
10		English	Chinese
11		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
12		English	White - British
13		<i>French</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
14		English	White - Irish
15		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White and Black Caribbean
16	France	French	White European
17		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
18		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
19	Nigeria	Yoruba	Other Black African
20		Akan (Twi/Asante)	Other Black African
21		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
22	<i>Portugal</i>	<i>Portuguese (Any Other)</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
23		English	Black or Black British - Any Other Black Background
24		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
25		English	White - British
26		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean

**Year 5, Class Y, School A**

	<b>Country of Origin</b>	<b>First Language</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
1		English	White - British
2		<i>Somali</i>	<i>Somali</i>
3		English	Black or Black British - Any Other Black Background
4	<i>Sierra Leone</i>	<i>Arabic (Any Other)</i>	<i>White Other</i>
5		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
6		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
7		<i>Arabic (Algeria)</i>	<i>White European</i>
8		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White and Black Caribbean
9		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
10	<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Bulgarian</i>	<i>White European</i>
11		English	Mixed/Dual Background - White and Black Caribbean
12		English	Black or Black British - Caribbean
13		English	Other Black African
14		English	White - British
15		<i>Chinese (Cantonese)</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
16		French	Other Black African
17		<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
18	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
19		<i>Vietnamese</i>	<i>Vietnamese</i>
20	Nigeria	Yoruba	Other Black African
21		Akan (Twi/Asante)	Other Black African
22		Chinese (Cantonese)	Chinese
23		Vietnamese	Chinese
24		<i>Luganda</i>	<i>Other Black African</i>
25		English	White - British
26		Bengali (Any Other)	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi

## Appendix 5: Interview questions

### Mary Hoffman, author of “The Colour of Home”

I am currently undertaking some research on children’s books about refugees. I would like to ask you some questions particularly focussing on your book “The Colour of Home”, as it deals with the refugee experience, but I would also like to explore your general philosophy on books for children about controversial issues.

1. When you conceived of the idea behind “The Colour of Home” did you intend the book to have a message or a purpose?
2. I understand you spent some time researching for “The Colour of Home.” Could you explain how you went about this?
3. Some adults are of the view that the subject matter of books like “The Colour of Home” contains elements that are too frightening for young children. What do you feel about that?
4. What does “The Colour of Home” offer children that helps them understand the refugee experience?
5. How effective do you think “The Colour of Home” could be in terms of changing attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers?
6. How do you think refugee children would react to the book, particularly if they had been through a similar experience to Hassan?
7. How do you think Somali children might feel about the images portrayed of their country in the book?
8. Do you think that there is a potential problem with authors who are not refugees presenting an outsiders viewpoint on a very complex issue?
9. How would you answer critics who suggest that writers should not write about cultures other than their own?
10. What kind of reader response have you had to the book?
11. What did you think of the activities suggested for use with “The Colour of Home” in Carolyn Herbert’s programme of work for PSHE and Citizenship, “A Welcome Experience”?
12. Do you have any plans to write more books about refugees?

## **Beverley Naidoo, author of “The Other Side of Truth”**

I am currently undertaking some research on children’s books about refugees. I would like to ask you some questions particularly focussing on your latest books, “The Other Side of Truth”, and “Web of Lies”, as they deal with the refugee experience, but I would also like to explore your general philosophy on books for children about controversial issues.

1. Until you wrote “The Other Side of Truth” and “Web of Lies”, your books were always about South Africa. Why did you change focus at this point to write about refugee children from Nigeria, arriving in Britain?
2. Was it difficult to write about children coming from a country which I understand you have never been to?
3. Did you intend the books have a message or a purpose?
4. You write in the preface to “Journey to Jo’burg”: *“It was a powerful theme but my belief is that young people have the right to think about the questions the book raises – even if some adults feel uncomfortable answering them.”* Does this apply to “The Other Side of Truth” and “Web of Lies” too?
5. Is it your experience that children are more comfortable with these kinds of books than the adults who may be caring for them?
6. I’d like to ask you about “Web of Lies”. Why did you feel that you had to follow “The Other Side of Truth”, a book that could be said to encompass the situation of unaccompanied asylum seeking children, with a sequel?
7. What do your books offer children that helps them understand the refugee experience?
8. In your book “Through Whose Eyes” (1992, Trentham Books), which was based on your PhD thesis, you set out to change attitudes to racism through literature for young people. How successful was this?
9. How effective do you think “The Other Side of Truth” and “Web of Lies” could be in terms of changing attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers?
10. How do you think refugee children would react to the books, particularly if they had been through a similar experience to Sade and Femi?
11. “The Other Side of Truth” is the type of book that teachers might read to a class in a multi-cultural neighbourhood. How do you think

Nigerian children might feel about the images portrayed of their country, and the vulnerable situation of Sade and Femi on arrival in England?

12. Do you think that there is a potential problem with authors who are not refugees, or not from the culture about which they are writing, presenting an outsiders viewpoint on a very complex issue?
13. I've read all your books and am a great admirer of your writing. However there were some details in "Chain of Fire" that shocked me, and I wondered how palatable they would be to young readers. What is your feeling about this?
14. At a recent conference on "Children Literature and Diversity" books like yours were referred to as "issues" books. Would you categorise them in this way?
15. Do you have any plans to write more books about refugees?

## **Jill Rutter, Refugee Education Expert**

1. Where do you think young people's general view of refugees comes from?
2. How effective do you think books such as "The Colour of Home" by Mary Hoffman, "The Other Side of Truth" by Beverley Naidoo and "Refugee Boy" by Benjamin Zephaniah could be in terms of changing attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers?
3. Some adults are of the view that the subject matter of books like "The Colour of Home" and "The Other Side of Truth" contain elements that are too frightening for young children. What do you feel about that?
4. Do you think there might be other problems with using children's literature in this way?
5. How do you think refugee children would react to the books, particularly if they had been through similar experiences?
6. Even if they hadn't been through exactly the same experiences, do you think there is a potential for the texts to be damaging to refugee children, if read aloud in class?
7. Taking "The Colour of Home" and "The Other Side of Truth" as examples, how do you think children with a heritage from Somalia and Nigeria might feel if these books were read to a class, even if they had not been there themselves?
8. What do you think the role of the teacher is when introducing these texts to children?
9. What do you think parents' opinions might be of these books?
10. Do you think the book might change relationships or interactions in the class between refugees and non-refugees? If so, positively or negatively?
11. Do you think that there is a potential problem with authors who are not refugees, or not from the culture about which they are writing, presenting an outsiders viewpoint on a very complex issue?
12. Would you like to see more books like this one written for children?

## **April and Nerys, Year 1 teachers**

### Reading “The Colour of Home” by Mary Hoffman to Year 1

1. What did you think of the book?
2. Do you think it's a suitable book for young children?
3. Do you think there are any problems with it?
4. What do you think the children got out of the book?
5. Have you got any Somali children in the class? What did they think of it?
6. Do you have any other refugee children in the class?
7. Where do you think children's general view of refugees comes from?
8. Do you think this is a good book to use, in order to educate children about the refugee experience?
9. Do you feel you managed to change any of the children's perceptions of refugees through the experience?
10. If so, was this mainly through the subject matter of the book, or by the discussions that you are having around the book?

**Simon, Year 3 teacher**

Reading "The Colour of Home" by Mary Hoffman with Year 3

1. What kinds of activities did your class do in response to this book?
2. What year group do you think the book is best suited to and why?
3. What do you think of the book? Do you think there are any problems with it?
4. What do you think the children got out of the book?
5. Have you got any Somali children in the class? What did they think of it?
6. Do you have any other refugee children in the class?
7. Where do you think children's general view of refugees comes from?
8. Do you think this is a good book to use, in order to educate children about the refugee experience?
9. Do you feel you managed to change any of the children's perceptions of refugees through the experience?
10. If so, was this mainly through the subject matter of the book, or by the discussions that you are having around the book?

**Charlie, Year 3 teacher**

Reading "The Colour of Home" by Mary Hoffman with Year 3

1. What impact do you think reading this book had on your class?
2. What do you think of the book? Do you think there are any problems with it?
3. Where do you think children's general view of refugees comes from?
4. Do you feel you managed to change any of the children's perceptions of refugees through the experience?
5. Do you have any refugee children in the class?
6. If so, do you think it was disturbing for them to read this book?
7. What impact do you think reading this book had on the Somali children in the class?
8. Do you think the book is best suited to a Year 3 class?
9. What effect do you think the Skype interview with Mary Hoffman had?
10. If you read this book with another class over 3 weeks, would you approach it in a different way at all?

## **Sophie and Violet, Year 5 teachers**

### Reading “The Other Side of Truth” with Year 5

1. What impact do you think reading “The Other Side of Truth” had generally on your class?
2. Do you think there are any problems with the book?
3. Did you find the issues it raised difficult to deal with at any stage?
4. Did you uncover particular prejudices that the class may have had about refugees?
5. Where do you think children’s general view of refugees comes from?
6. Do you feel you have managed to change any of the children’s perceptions of refugees through sharing this book with them?
7. Do you think any refugee children in the class might have found the book disturbing?
8. Would you change your approach in any way if you taught this book again?
9. How did Beverley Naidoo’s visit affect the experience?
10. Can you think of any particularly interesting reactions or observations that individual children made about the book?

## Appendix 6: Overview and Questions for Discussion Groups

Shown by year group, pseudonym, and “country of origin” (NB not nationality), taken from school database.

### Year 1, School B

<i>Group 1</i>	Daniel	China
	Maria	Colombia
<i>Group 2</i>	Anca	Romania
	David	Caribbean
	Habib	Pakistan
	Elbasana	Albania

### Year 3, School A

<i>Group 1</i>	Shanaye	Nigeria
	Mashad	Afghanistan
	Debora	Ivory Coast
<i>Group 2</i>	John	Britain/ Nigeria
	Peliona	Kosovo
	Ahmed	Egypt

### Year 5, School A

<i>Group 1 – Class X Boys</i>		
	Abdi	Somalia
	Moussa	Somalia
<i>Group 2 – Class X Girls</i>		
	Ade	Nigeria
	Amechi	Nigeria
<i>Group 3 – Class X Girls</i>		
	Dana	Romania
	Idil	Somalia
<i>Group 4 – Class Y Boys</i>		
	Thomas	Uganda
	Kye	Trinidad and Jamaica
	Ola	Nigeria
<i>Group 5 – Class Y Girls</i>		
	Jasmine	China and Vietnam
	Dawo	Somalia
	Amisha	Bangladesh
	Solange	Democratic Republic of Congo

## **Questions for Year 3 discussion groups**

### Year 3: The Colour of Home

1. What is your favourite part of the story?
2. Is there anything about the book that you don't like?
3. Are there bits in the book that you think are frightening?
4. What is the most frightening thing that has ever happened to you?
5. Have your family come here from another country? If so, where?
6. Have you ever been to another country where you don't speak the language? How did it feel?
7. Have new children arrived in your class who didn't speak English? How do you think they felt? What did you do to help?
8. What do you think the message of this book is? Why do you think Mary Hoffman wrote it?

## **Questions for Year 5 discussion groups**

### Year 5: The Other Side of Truth

1. What do you think of the book so far?
2. Which part stands out most in your mind at this point?
3. Have you learnt anything from the book that you didn't know before?
4. Are there bits in the book that you think are frightening?
5. Is there anything about the book that you don't like?
6. Why do you think Beverley Naidoo wrote this book?
7. Have your family come here from another country? If so, where?
8. Have any experiences like those in the book happened to you?
9. If there was a child in your class who was a refugee, do you think this book would be difficult for them?
10. If so, should the teacher not read it?

## Appendix 7: Letters to Parents

### School A

01/05/12

Dear Year 3 & Year 5 Parents and Carers

As part of their Literacy lessons, children in Year 3 and Year 5 will be studying two books concerned with children arriving in the UK as refugees. As part of the project, it is intended that children in Year 3 should be able to conduct a Skype interview with one author, and Year 5 will be visited by the other author, who will give a talk about her work, and answer questions. Both events will be facilitated by Julia Hope, a Lecturer in Primary Education at Goldsmiths College, who is interested in the way such books are used in the classroom.

Julia is also hoping to visit both classes during this time to talk to the children about their responses to the books. She would like to use her observations and discussions with teachers and pupils in her own research. She would also like to record some of the discussions she has with children in the class. If you have any objections to this please could you contact me before next Monday.

Many thanks

.....  
Deputy Headteacher

**School B**

12/06/11

Dear Parents and Carers

On Friday our class is having a visit from Julia Hope, who is a Lecturer in Primary Education at Goldsmiths College in New Cross. She will be joining us for our PSHCE lesson, when we will be sharing a book and doing some work around it.

Julia is interested in researching children's books in the primary school and will be talking to children about their work. She would also like to record some of the discussions we will be having with children in the class. If you have any objection to your child being recorded on a voice file, then please let me know before Friday.

Many thanks

.....

.....

Class Teacher

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