Including alternative stories in the mainstream. How transcultural young people in Norway perform creative cultural resistance in and outside of school

Joke Dewilde & Thor-André Skrefsrud

Published online: 23 Feb 2016.

Submit your article to this journal ⧉

Article views: 303

View related articles ⧉

View Crossmark data ⧉

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

∂ OPEN ACCESS

Including alternative stories in the mainstream. How transcultural young people in Norway perform creative cultural resistance in and outside of school

Joke Dewilde[a,b] and Thor-André Skrefsrud[a]

[a]Department of Social Sciences, Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Elverum, Norway; [b]Department of Teacher Education and School Research, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway

ABSTRACT

The development of an inclusive pedagogy takes on new urgency in Norwegian schools as the student body has become increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. Traditionally, the Norwegian school has been dominated by homogenising and assimilating discourses, whereas alternative voices have been situated at the margins. In response to this tendency, we present two transcultural students' autoethnographic stories produced in alternative spaces to the Norwegian mainstream, that is, in a transition class for newly arrived students and on Facebook. Both spaces are perceived as contact zones in the sense that they are culturally and linguistically complex. This article illustrates how the students perform cultural and linguistic resistance towards dominant homogenising discourses as the transition class and Facebook seem to offer opportunities for constructing alternative stories. Moreover, we contend that these alternative stories offer important knowledge for conventional education contexts since they represent stories of competence in contrast to the assumed limitations of these students.

Introduction

Most schools today are characterised by an increasingly diverse student population with a growing cultural and linguistic complexity. The development of an inclusive pedagogy takes on new urgency as it enables students to position, produce and represent their own experiences and knowledge in the mainstream (Cummins and Early 2011, 161). However, as the mainstream has been dominated historically by mono-cultural and monolingual practices, however, alternative stories of cultural and linguistic complexity are often positioned on the margins of the majority classroom (Baker 2011). To include such stories in the mainstream is therefore a constant challenge for schools as a way to enable marginalised students to take on the roles of powerful agents and to challenge cultural homogenisation and assimilation in the interests of equity and social justice (Freire 1970).

From this point of departure, the article draws attention to alternative stories produced by transcultural young people in Norway. Moreover, we investigate how students perform creative cultural resistance by exploring their life stories in two alternative spaces to the mainstream classroom, that is, in transition classes for newly arrived students and in the social medium of Facebook. The students are transcultural in the sense that they moved to Norway in the middle of their schooling

CONTACT Joke Dewilde ✉ j.i.dewilde@ils.uio.no, joke.dewilde@hihm.no

and thus draw on resources from several cultures and languages for meaning making. We argue that, in contrast to pedagogies that ignore students' transcultural and translingual practices and experiences, these alternative spaces appear to provide multiple opportunities for the students to construct their complex cultural and linguistic identities. Furthermore, we contend that these alternative stories offer important knowledge for conventional education contexts, enabling students to reclaim the classroom as a transformative space (Cummins and Early 2011, 6). We draw on material from the Nordic project, *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice – A Study of Successful Immigrant Students and School Communities in Four Nordic Countries*.

In this article we regard the concept of space as highly relevant for pedagogical thinking and practice as it puts emphasis on context, place, identity and lived experiences (Soja 2010). The spatial turn in the field of education reminds us that the schools need a pedagogy which recognises the importance of context and situatedness. Following Kitchens (2009, 240), a spatial-oriented pedagogy is thus a situated pedagogy which 'connects the curriculum to the everyday lives of students'. Thus, a spatial pedagogy acknowledges that school is not a neutral arena, but involves mechanisms and processes of inclusion as well as exclusion and marginalisation. By paying attention to a contextual approach to teaching and learning, a spatial pedagogy aims to critically examine current educational practices, and to maximise academic development and civic participation for all students, including transcultural students.

On this basis, a spatial pedagogy positions itself as a voice against a contemporary and prevailing pedagogy of place- and spacelessness. As governments and educators in many countries seek to develop effective policies to improve the performance of their education systems, attention is increasingly paid to international comparisons and the assessment of educational outcome through standardised tests. The consequence is an educational practice which places a primary focus on 'what works' within a standardised curriculum and across different contexts. This leaves less room for the discussion of content, which in turn leaves the contextual and situated dimension of pedagogical practice unthematised (Engen and Lied 2011). As Baker (2011) reminds us, however, a spaceless pedagogy may imply a hidden and implicit mono-cultural approach to diversity, which promotes cultural and linguistic homogenisation and assimilation.

In Norway, primary and lower secondary education is founded on the principle of a unified school which aims at providing equal education for all, based on one national curriculum (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2007). Furthermore, as the student population of Norway becomes increasingly diverse, contemporary educational policies have highlighted the importance of a pedagogy which includes an affirming view of different backgrounds and builds on the students' cultural and linguistic resources (Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2012).

Historically, however, this school involved cultural and linguistic assimilation due to the nation-building process which started in the 1850s in Norway and lasted until just after the post-war era (Engen and Lied 2011). Schools were given a key role in the implementation of a national programme based on a selected set of cultural motives. Thus, although the nation-building period was a golden age in modern Norwegian history, there was definitely a downside to it, as it failed to recognise the significance of several local cultures in the mainstream. For many young people – like the Sami, the Romani, the Forest Finns and others – their cultural identities were never considered as part of the common culture in school.

In spite of today's inclusive policies, there is reason to believe that assimilation still prevails in school, but now in a more or less concealed manner (Baker 2011). As educational polices increasingly pay attention to the effective production of learning outcomes in a reduced number of subjects, the contextual and situated side of education is downplayed. School as spaces for performative action, intervention and transformation, related to the everyday lives of students (Kitchens 2009, 240), is considered irrelevant, which means that success in school is restricted to a limited set of identities.

On this basis this article explores how transcultural students reclaim the complexity of their cultural and linguistic stories in two alternative spaces to the mainstream. The research question is:

how do transcultural young people create cultural and linguistic resistance in two autoethnographic stories produced in two alternative spaces to the mainstream?

The article is organised along the following lines. First, Pratt's (1991) theoretical and analytical concepts of contact zone and autoethnography are presented and discussed. Following from this, the research project *Learning Spaces of Social Justice and Inclusion* is briefly introduced. In the remainder of the article, we apply Pratt's concepts to two students' stories, one performed in a transition class for newly arrived students and one performed in Facebook. We conclude by challenging more conventional education contexts to learn from these alternative spaces in order for transcultural students to reclaim the mainstream classroom as a transformative space.

Theoretical and analytical approach: contact zone and autoethnography

Theoretically, we draw on Pratt's (1991) concepts of 'contact zones' and 'autoethnography'. The contact zone is an idea which Pratt develops in opposition to tendency to analyse culture, identity and language as if they were stable, monolithic and coherent:

> The idea of the contact zone is intended in part to contrast with ideas of community that underlie much of the thinking about language, communication, and culture that gets done in the academy. Languages were seen as living in 'speech communities', and these tended to be theorized as discrete, self-defined, coherent entities, held together by a homogeneous competence or grammar shared identically and equally among all the members. (37)

The contact zone thus refers to the complexity of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity which characterises a modern pluralist society. The term was coined to illustrate the cultural exchange that takes place due to global migration flows and processes of globalisation and describes the heterogeneous and hybrid context which most people experience in their everyday life. In this way the contact zone refers to what has been called super-diversity (Vertovec 2007), and even includes work on transculturality (Welsch 1999) and translanguaging (Canagarajah 2013) as new ways of describing the cultural and linguistic intermingling, exchange and transformation in a modern society.

According to Pratt (1991), the contact zone is not a safe place. On the contrary, it wants us to constantly expose ourselves through negotiations. It puts ideas and identities at risk. One also has to bear in mind that everything which is being said in the contact zone is comprehended by others in a heterogeneous way. On the basis of this description, Pratt underlines the importance of 'safe houses', which she takes to refer to 'places for healing and mutual recognition, safe houses in which to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world that they can then bring into the contact zone' (40). However, as we will illustrate in our analysis below, we do not believe that it is possible to separate safe houses from contact zones. Rather, spaces may be more or less safe in terms of possibilities for groups and persons to constitute themselves. In other words, we perceive safe houses as part of the contact zone. Instead, we are concerned with the increased possibilities for safe *moments* in the two spaces where the young people in our investigation sojourn, and what we can learn from those moments and bring from the margins to the centre of what is happening in schools.

The second concept is what Pratt calls 'autoethnographic text' (Pratt 1991). According to Pratt, autoethnography is an important phenomenon which describes a person's or a group's life in the alternation between the contact zone and the safe space, thus not only in written texts but also in a broader sense as stories, expressions and illustrations. Autoethnography often constitutes a marginalised group's interaction with the dominant culture in which 'people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations other have made of them' (35). It involves a selective collaboration with motives from the dominant culture, and is a way for the marginalised to create cultural resistance by apparently adopting practices and mind-sets from the dominant culture. However, the adopted dominant motives are merged with indigenous idioms to form a self-representation which serve as a protest against dominant modes of understanding. Autoethnography is thus a contextual way of situating oneself and negotiating self-identity in a new environment.

Below, we present and analyse two autoethnographic stories produced in a transition class and on Facebook by the transcultural young people Assim and Bahar, respectively. We show how the students construct alternative stories in these spaces which challenge dominant homogeneous discourses in society in general and in the mainstream more specifically.

The research project: aims and methodology

As referred to in the introduction, the two studies reported on in this article are part of a larger research project *Learning Spaces for Inclusion and Social Justice,* which is a collaborative project between researchers from Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden funded by NordForsk. The objective is to contribute to more inclusive practices in different learning spaces, particularly for students from cultural and linguistic minorities. Even though the countries involved strive for inclusive educational policies, research often documents a different reality (Taguma et al. 2009). Accordingly, the project's overarching aim sets out to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and socially just life for these students.

In this article, we draw on two studies from the Norwegian project. For reasons of research ethics, the names of the students are replaced with pseudonyms in accordance with the students' wishes. In the first study, Skrefsrud conducted a year-long ethnographically inspired study (cf. Hammersley and Atkinson 2007) which included participant observations in a transition class with seven newly arrived students between the age of 11 and 13 in a primary school in Norway. At the beginning of the study, two of the students had been in the transition class for a year, while the rest had arrived two years earlier. The students were born in Iran, Somalia, Romania, Iceland, Poland and Vietnam. In school, Skrefsrud observed the students both in the transition class, in their regular classes and during breaks. The data also include observation of school activities during the international mother tongue day, interviews with teachers and school leaders as well as participant observations in a year-long course on home–school cooperation with families from language minorities, which the school was involved in together with two pre-schools and one other school. In the second study, Dewilde conducted a year-long linguistic ethnographically inspired study (cf. Copland and Creese 2015) of six young people in Norway. At the time of the study, the young people were between the age of 16 and 20 and attended the same upper secondary school in the East of Norway, though in different education programmes. They were born in Afghanistan, Eritrea, Iraq and Somalia, and had lived in Norway for approximately five years. All the students were recommended to the researcher by their lower secondary school teachers who characterised them as students who succeeded socially and academically, an understanding of success that the teachers and researcher had agreed upon. Dewilde observed all of them in school and three of them during their spare time, including at soccer practice and online when involved in Facebook activity. In school, she observed them during lessons as well as during breaks and sports days.

Autoethnographic stories in a transition class

In this part of the study, we focus on an autoethnographic story produced in a transition class for newly arrived students in a Norwegian primary school. The school is situated in a medium-sized town in South East Norway and has 450 students from grade 1 to 7 (age 6–13) and approximately 100 employees. Twenty percent of the school's pupils speak language other than Norwegian at home, and 39 different languages in all are spoken at the school. The school is one of two schools in the municipality which offers a transition class for newly arrived students at the primary school level.

In Norway and many other countries, the use of separate transition classes is a common way of organising education for newly arrived students (Bunar 2010; Rambøll 2013). The content and length of the introductory programme may vary though, depending on the academic background of the students. However, following the educational directives from the Ministry of Education and Research from 1 August 2012, the students may stay in the transition class for a maximum of

two years, even though most students stay for approximately a year. The mission of the programme is to prepare the students for further education within the mainstream.

Within this introduction model, the municipality may organise special educational facilities for newly arrived students through in-schools programme and separate-site models (Short 2002). In-school programmes entail that the students attend their local school and interact with their regular class on a daily basis in different subjects and learning activities, but are given intensive tuition in Norwegian as a second language in separated groups. A separate-side model means that the school's transition class gathers newly arrived students from the whole of the municipality, even though the school is different to the one the students belong to administratively. Also within this model, the students additionally belong to a regular class and interact with their peers daily. The school in this study has a separate-site model.

However, the introduction model is up for debate. There are examples of municipalities in Norway which argue for direct integration into mainstream, based on their good experiences with mainstream models (Dewilde, Kulbrandstad, and Skrefsrud 2014). Additionally, in a recent report, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training pinpoints a number of weaknesses in the introductory model (Rambøll 2013). The arguments are that even though a separate transition class creates a supportive and comforting learning environment for the newly arrived students, the separation from the regular class in the end becomes an obstacle. With regard to social relationships, separation makes it more difficult to make friends with other children in the regular class. Academically, the argument is that language learning is given priority at the expense of other subjects like mathematics and natural science, and that the transition class represents a career put on hold. In other words, the transition class is simply too safe a space, both socially and academically.

From this point of departure, the study draws attention to the complexity of transition classes. Even though the transition class creates a safe learning environment, the construction of safeness is constantly being challenged by processes of unsafeness. This turns the transition class into a contact zone. In fact, it seems to offer a space for the newly arrived students to negotiate and perform their life stories in an oscillation between safeness and unsafeness in a way the critique may overlook.

Here, we draw on an autoethnographic story produced by a newly arrived student in collaboration with his teacher in the transition class. The example is one of several autoethnographic expressions in the material. In order to protect the identity of the student, the countries of birth and of transit have been changed. This change does not affect our argument as it is the teacher's response which is in focus.

Assim was born in Iran, but moved with his family to Turkey at the age of 6 and to Norway when he was 11 years old. He attended the transition class when he was in the sixth grade. At the time of the study, Assim was in the seventh grade. Five hours a week he got mainstream tuition in mathematics in his regular class, as well as practical-aesthetic subjects, whereas the rest of the time he attended the transition class. Additionally, he received bilingual subject tuition in Farsi for two hours per week.

Although the transition class consisted of fewer students than in a regular class, the span in ages, pedagogical needs, backgrounds and life-experiences were probably larger. Two of the students had their background from the Dadaab-refugee camp in Kenya and had very little schooling, while the Icelandic, Polish and the Romanian students had full schooling from their home countries prior to arrival. Moreover, the Romanian students were familiar with a school system more directed towards discipline, effectiveness and learning outcome than the Norwegian system. This was also the case for Assim, who had one year of schooling from Iran and four years of schooling from Turkey before he came to Norway.

Thus, the range and variety of histories, school experiences, life-worlds and legacies obviously create a learning environment which might be socially and academically demanding for the newly arrived students and pedagogically demanding for the teachers. The transition class constitutes a contact zone in the sense that its heterogeneity invites participants to expose themselves through identity negotiations in a way that puts identities and ideas at risk (cf. Cummins and Early 2011).

On the other hand, the study indicates how the transition class also might provide a space for the students where they can try out their complex identities among peers who share the same experiences of migration, and among competent teachers who are able to recognise the significance that these experiences have for the students' self-understanding. This is illustrated in the particular autoethnographic story recounted below.

Even though Assim was born in Iran, had his first year in school in Iran and spoke Farsi at home, it became evident that this family background was not something he wanted to be associated with in class, neither in the transition class nor in his regular class. In his fieldnotes, Skrefsrud records:

> *Vignette*
> The teacher tells me that Assim openly dislikes the weekly hours of bilingual subject tuition in the Persian language, and that he wonders why Turkish – the language he is familiar with from his four years of schooling in transit – cannot be the language of the bilingual subject tuition. According to the teacher, Assim had critically asked why his regular teacher had put an Iranian flag on the Christmas tree in the school's hallway, the same way as the other students were represented with 'their' flags. He was not from Iran, even though he was born there – he was from Turkey! (fieldnotes transition class, 21 February 2014)

An autoethnographic story involves a self-representation which is constructed in a selective collaboration with dominant modes of understanding (Pratt 1991). Thus, the response from the teacher to Assim's confusion was not to reinforce the view of the parents and the school, but rather to support the student in his negotiations of self-formation and social formation in the new school context. Together, the teacher and the student performed an autoethnographic text which engaged with the dominant representations in a way that challenged the power relations between the student, the school and the parents.

With regard to Assim's legal right to bilingual subject tuition in Farsi, this was not something that the teacher was able – or wanted – to question. The decision regarding language was made by the school and his parents, based on the locus of his birth and the school's access to a bilingual teacher in Farsi. Furthermore, the decision is in correspondence with Norwegian educational policies, which state that students have a right to education in reading and writing in their mother tongue, bilingual subject teaching, or both as long as it is necessary to gain sufficient Norwegian skills to follow regular education. It was obviously important for the family and to the benefit of the student in the sense that he became more familiar with the family language, even though he seemed to dislike the lessons and wanted Turkish to be the language of bilingual subject tuition. Nevertheless, the teacher took Assim's struggle of representation seriously and paid attention to the space the student was given for identity formation in his new environment. First, the teacher did not replace the Iranian flag with a Turkish flag on the school's Christmas tree, but simply added a Turkish flag to the tree. Second, as a response to the question from Assim, she decided to put up a map in the transition class, with pictures of each student. For some of the students – also for Assim – this meant that there were three pictures on the wall, representing the students' place of birth, the geographical place of transit and their new country of residence, in Assim's case, his Persian, Turkish and Norwegian heritage. Furthermore, Assim's experiences from a Turkish school context were often used as a frame of reference in the interaction between him and the teacher. Skrefsrud's fieldnotes record:

> *Vignette*
> The teacher asks Assim questions like: 'How do you say this in Turkish?', 'What did your teacher in Turkey tell you about this?' and 'How did you do this when you went to school in Turkey?' The teacher's awareness of Assim's self-understanding is clearly directed towards his years of schooling in Turkey and his competencies in Turkish as his academic language. (fieldnotes transition class, 18 February 2014)

From this example we see that the teacher and the student seemingly accept the discourse that national artefacts – like flags – are useful tools to acknowledge students' cultural background. In this way both Assim and his teacher collaborate and interact with a dominant – and rather superficial – way of acknowledging cultural background which many schools adopt when they are to implement a multicultural pedagogy (cf. Özerk 2008). On the other hand, the teacher seems to be aware of the

complexity which characterises modern patterns of migration and the possible reinforcement of student identity which may follow from such a practice. The teacher's question to Assim: 'How did you do this when you went to school in Turkey' and her way of activating the student's prior knowledge and academic skills in Turkish also underline this interpretation. Following Vertovec (2009), Assim's story of migration can be described in terms of 'transnationalism', which for many is a lived experience, as many travel routes pass through different countries, with longer stays in the country of transit. On this basis the teacher's response to Assim's frustration can be interpreted as a silent protest against a well-intended, but reductive practice which overlooks the multi-dimensional nature of identity.

As an autoethnographic story, the example may illustrate how the teacher represents the student's self-understanding in a way that engages critically with traditional ways of understanding relations between identity and nationality. It is thus worth noticing that it seems difficult for Assim to perform autoethnography by himself in a way that has an impact. The dominant discourse is too strong. Through the interaction with the student however, the teacher contributes to construct spaces for the student in which he is allowed to play out his transcultural stories of identity. As Pratt (1991) writes, autoethnographic texts are constructed in dialogue with texts in which subjects represent to themselves their others. Here, the dialogue is extended to include the teacher, which may be interpreted as challenging the hegemony and the existing power relations together with the student.

Assim's autoethnographic story is clearly a product of the contact zone as the school context involves different kinds of interactions with understandings and practices within asymmetrical relations of power (Kitchens 2009, 247). Thus, in this example the transition class is not too safe a place, which we saw was the main criticism of this type of organising tuition for newly arrived students. On the contrary the transition class serves as an arena for the student to develop and perform transcultural identity stories in ways that help him to situate within a new context of learning. As Pratt (1991) points out, the audience of autoethnographic expressions is heterogeneous. For Assim and the teacher this implies that they cannot be sure how the meaning of their story is comprehended. Readers who do not recognise the significance of transnational experiences for identity, or who defend a stable and centred sense of knowledge and reality may not regard the expression as a mode of resistance. Even though the story seeks to reverse estrangement and reconstitute what Assim experiences as a divided self, it may not be understood that way, which is the art of the contact zone.

Autoethnographic text on Facebook

Now, we turn our attention outside of school, more specifically to the social medium of Facebook. This popular social networking service was launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004. Anyone who is 13 years of age can register and create a user profile (Facebook 2015), which allows for adding other users as friends, exchanging messages, posting status updates and photos, sharing videos and receiving notifications when others update their profile. These profiles serve two main purposes: firstly, the owners establish and maintain social ties, and secondly, they create their own image through their activity (Crystal 2011, 53). This image is further shaped by the way the message is formulated, that is, through the level of vocabulary, spelling conventions, the use of emoticons, etc. (Dąbrowska 2013, 128). In effect, Facebook allows the user to project on others who one wants to be rather than who one really is (Baron 2010, 85).

We perceive Facebook as a social context where particular political and societal ideologies dominate and where users interact to reproduce or challenge them (Dąbrowska 2013, 140–142). The choices a user makes in terms of language and content are thus understood as an act of positioning within a wider context and ultimately as identity construction and negotiation (Pavlenko and Blackledge 2004). On these grounds, we conceptualise Facebook as a contact zone, thus paying particular attention to the cultural and linguistic complexity of this social networking service. Moreover, we argue that Facebook provides a space where young people can try out their complex identities among Facebook friends.

One of the students in the study is the 16-year-old Bahar. She was born in Afghanistan and moved to Norway five years before the research project. She did well at school and had a large network of international friends, both in and outside of school. At the time of the study, Bahar had approximately 500 Facebook friends. Some of them grew up in Afghanistan, like herself, but are now spread across the world. Others are born in different countries, but moved to Norway, and some of them were born and had grown up in Norway. Bahar is a daily user of Facebook. She calls it a free space, as she uses it to communicate with friends, away from her family who may not like her chatting with boys or the liberal content of the links she shares (Dewilde, forthcoming). The data for the analysis presented below consist of her Facebook postings between September 2012 and June 2014 collected by Dewilde. The researcher also involved Bahar in the analysis process by frequently corresponding through personal messages where she asked the student to comment or expand on recurrent topics in the posts. These topics were, for example, Afghanistan, dance, fashion, the football club FC Barcelona, Islam and weddings. The particular autoethnographic text in focus below is connected to Afghanistan, but as we can see, most of the other topics are connected to youth culture. We have chosen a text connected to Afghanistan, because this type of text illustrates Bahar's linguistic and cultural identity construction in a rich way, which is the focus of this article.

Bahar shares a link from 'Afghanistan's Next Top Models', which is a Facebook community with nearly 3000 likes at the time of the research. The community speaks to popular youth culture and urges '[t]hose who wants to Participate send us their Pictures at pic@afgnexttopmodels.com' (Afghanistan's Next Top Model n.d.-b). *Top Model* or *Next Top Model* is originally an American reality television show, but is now produced and viewed in many countries across the world. In the show, models compete and the prize is typically a contract with a major modelling agency (Top Model n.d.). An Afghan version of the show was aired for the first time in 2007 (Wikipedia n.d.-a) and caused commotion due to its liberal values (Clark-Flory 2007).

There is no doubt that the fashion-themed reality show focuses on appearance and looks, and more precisely, on the beauty of Afghan women. Bahar subscribes to and shares from several other communities on Facebook which all portray Afghanistan in a positive light. One of them, 'Afghan Culture', states that it aims at 'show[ing] the beautiful side of Afghanistan that media hides!!!' (Afghan Culture n.d.). In the extract at hand, Bahar shares a post which is compiled of three pictures portraying a son and his dad sitting on a bench. Each picture is linked to a speech bubble, together making up a story of a dad asking his son why he is so upset, whereupon the son asks why they are not Afghan, and the dad answers that this is impossible since Afghans are so special. The pictures are compiled from the movie *Finding Neverland* and exist in other adaptations too (e.g. in a Norwegian version where a dad asks his son if he looks forward to summer, whereupon the son answers that he lives in Bergen – which is one of Norway's rainiest cities).

The language used in the speech bubbles deviates from Standard English. This is clear from the fact that several words are rendered by single letters, like 'y' (why) and 'r' (are) 'ur' (you are). 'Wot' (What) is also a common deviant spelling in the internet and text message language. In the son's response 'y we r not afghan' the word order for question formations deviates from Standard English, that is, question word – subject – verb instead of question word – verb – subject, which is also common social media slang. The only comma used is in the boy's response, which again underlines the text's informal nature (cf. Crystal 2011).

When Bahar shares the post, she writes 'haha we are special Nargis Noori ♥♥♥'. The language used is English, like in the post, followed by three hearts at the end of the line which further emphasise her message. In addition, she tags her Facebook friend Nargis Noori, who, like herself, grew up in Afghanistan and now lives in Norway. Nargis responds by addressing Bahar in Dari with the term dear ('jani'). She continues in Norwegian by saying that it is well-put ('bra sagt'), thus affirming the message, further stressing it by adding five exclamation marks. Following from this, she draws on Dari and English to agree that they are both special, underlining this by adding that she loves Bahar, in English ('love you') and Norwegian ('Glad i deg'), and says that Bahar is beautiful ('pena mi'). Nargis ends with four icons, a smiley blowing a heart, two hearts and a smiley with eyes like hearts.

With the spread of the World Wide Web, social media such as Facebook constitute a contemporary creation of the contact zone which allow for, and perhaps even stimulate, autoethnography, critique and resistance to dominating discourses. We argue that Facebook allows for young people to construct multicultural and multilingual identities perhaps not so readily available in mainstream schools or in the wider society in Norway.

Bahar subscribes to several Facebook communities, some of them specifically relating to Afghanistan, such as 'Afghanistan's Next Top Models' in the figure above. Common to the communities is that they portray Afghanistan in a positive light. This is in contrast to the way the country is portrayed in Norwegian and Western media in general, that is, almost exclusively Afghanistan as a war country (e.g. Johansen and Senneset 2015; Tjernshaugen 2015). The Facebook extract is thus in dialogue with the wider societal discourses, and not a self-representation of Bahar. We see how Bahar challenges this war discourse, in this way representing an alternative voice. In other words, we find that Facebook offers a space for alternative discourses than dominant mainstream positions to be constructed and voiced.

As mentioned above, Bahar posts a text in English and addresses her Dari-speaking friend in English. Internet has contributed to English as a medium of communication being accepted across national boundaries also between two persons from the same language background (cf. Dąbrowska 2013). In this respect, Bahar's language choice may be linked to global (youth) culture and urban sophistication. However, this act may also be understood as a selective collaboration with the Western – or at least westernised – world, and thus 'involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror' (Pratt 1991, 35). An alternative interpretation may be that Bahar's use of English demonstrates replication of (or even co-option by) the dominant discourses of social media. The content of the texts, however, contributes to constructing a different chronicle about Afghanistan and its people as it contradicts Western modes of understanding Afghanistan. The dialogue between the two friends in response to the picture is not limited to Standard English, however, but has Dari or English internet slang word order, and it certainly contains elements of both Dari (written with the Latin alphabet) and Norwegian. This type of multilingual languaging, also called 'translanguaging' (Canagarajah 2013), again challenges understanding of languages as living in what Pratt (1991) refers to as 'speech communities', that is, as bounded, discrete entities shared identically and equally among all its members. Moreover, Facebook provides a space for students to draw on their entire communicative repertoire in new and flexible ways.

The audience of autoethnographic texts is complex (Pratt 1991). As already noted, Bahar's Facebook friends are a heterogeneous group. By tagging Nargis in the message, Bahar explicitly addresses a girl with similar immigration experiences as they were both born in Afghanistan and now live in Norway. Since the text is in English, however, it potentially also reaches out to friends who are born and have grown up in Norway, as well as friends who were born in different countries, but now live in Norway or another Western country. In effect, they may understand Bahar's text differently, depending on the experiences they bring to the contact zone. Friends belonging to a minority group, not necessarily from Afghanistan but possibly from other non-Western countries, who live in Norway or another Western country, may recognise the discourses Bahar challenges as the text 'constitute[s] a marginalized group's point of entry into the dominant circuits of print culture' (35), and accordingly read Bahar's texts as a form of resistance. Friends who belong to a dominant group, however, may interpret her postings as an expression of pride, which they may very well also be, but not necessarily of resistance, as they may not be aware of the societal discourses they may go against. When it comes to Bahar and Nargis' conversation, only multilingual speakers of Dari, English and Norwegian will be able to understand the entire interaction, whereas others will only understand chunks. The girls' translingual interaction mainly serves to stress the picture's message. It does not really expand it, but friends who do not master the three languages will not be able to grasp the full import of their message (cf. Canagarajah 2013).

In sum, Bahar's text is clearly a product of the contact zone. Her autoethnographic text is heterogeneous on the reception end as well as production end: readers will understand the picture with

accompanying speech bubbles differently depending on their position in the contact zone and their communicative repertoire; the same goes for the communication between the girls (cf. Pratt 1991). Bahar shows resistance to certain perceptions of Afghanistan. Facebook also provides a space where Bahar is able to constitute herself as a transcultural and translingual young person through the text. Her friend Nargis affirms her message, and she also gets several 'likes' from other Facebook friends. It may not be so clear in this particular extract, but very often several young people engage in the dialogue, not all sharing the same communicative repertoire. In other words, Facebook appears to be a social space where young people experiment with their languages and cultural identities and do not let communication stop at national boundaries. However, Bahar's resistance and critique may not reach out to wider audiences or may even be misunderstood, which are some of the perils of the contact zone (cf. Pratt 1991), due to its heterogeneity of meaning.

Concluding remarks

This article set out to investigate how two transcultural young people create cultural and linguistic resistance in two alternative spaces to the mainstream, that is, in a transition class and on the social medium of Facebook. We have illustrated how their autoethnographic stories may be interpreted as stories of resistance against dominant homogenising discourses in school and society. Furthermore, we have seen that these alternative spaces appear to provide safe moments for the students to explore and express their complex identities. Thus, both students in the study construct stories of competence which articulate a counter-discourse to the assumed limitations of diverse students which often characterise the dominant mainstream.

Moreover, we have adapted the work of Pratt (1991) by further developing the concepts of contact zones and safe houses. We suggest the idea of safe moments which allows for more nuanced and complex understandings of intercultural work and experiences of young people. Safe moments provide opportunities for students to create alternative stories drawing on their multiple identities. These stories should be part of any spatial and situated pedagogy (Kitchens 2009).

In our study Assim and Bahar have entered the Norwegian school system with transcultural and translingual experiences from multi-dimensional and hybrid contexts. Our analyses show that both the students draw upon their transcultural experiences. This underlines the importance of these experiences for their sense of belonging in a new school context. Both stories are created outside of mainstream, which points to the significance alternative spaces might have for young people's identity work in order for them to reclaim the mainstream classroom as a transformative space. Thus, extended research is needed on alternative spaces central to young people's lives which seem to offer students safe moments to construct themselves in relation to the mainstream. In addition, we need more research on the development of an inclusive pedagogy and didactics which enables teachers to include such stories in more conventional education contexts.

Funding

Notes on contributors

Joke Dewilde, Ph.D., is currently employed as a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Teacher Education and School Research at the University of Oslo, Norway. She also holds a 20% position as Associate Professor in Education at Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Norway. Her research is in the fields of bilingualism and bilingual education, especially relating to bilingual teachers in Norwegian schools and newly arrived young people as writers in and outside of school.

Thor-André Skrefsrud, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in Education at Hedmark University of Applied Sciences, Norway. His research interests include intercultural education, religious education and educational philosophy. Currently he is working in a Nordforsk project on inclusive teacher education.

References

Afghan Culture. n.d. "Afghan Culture: Community." Accessed August 1, 2014. https://www.facebook.com/#!/afgculture2014?fref=photo.

Wikipedia. n.d.-a. "Afghanistan's Next Top Model." Accessed February 11, 2015. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanistan's_Next_Top_Model.

Afghanistan's Next Top Model. n.d.-b. "Afghanistan's Next Top Model: Community." Accessed February 11, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/#!/AfghanistansNextTopModels?fref=ts.

Baker, C. 2011. Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Baron, N. S. 2010. Always on: Language in an Online and Mobile World. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bunar, N. 2010. Nyanlända och lärande. En forskningsöversikt om nyanlända elever I den svenska skolan. Stockholm: Vetenskapsrådet.

Canagarajah, A. S. 2013. "Introduction." In Literacy as Translingual Practice: Between Communities and Classrooms, edited by A. S. Canagarajah, 1–10. New York: Routledge.

Clark-Flory, T. 2007. "Afghanistan's Next Top Model." Accessed February 11, 2015. http://www.salon.com/2007/10/01/afghanistan_models/.

Copland, F., and A. Creese. 2015. Linguistic Ethnography. Collecting, Analysing and Presenting Data. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Crystal, D. 2011. Internet Linguistics: A Student Guide. London: Routledge.

Cummins, J., and M. Early. 2011. Identity Texts: The Collaborative Creation of Power in Multilingual Schools. London: Trentham Books.

Dąbrowska, M. 2013. Variation in Language: Faces of Facebook English. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang AG.

Dewilde, J. Forthcoming. "Tell Me How I Can Get to Know You." Negotiating Research Strategies with Late Arrivals in Norwegian Schools in Field Conversations. SAGE Research Methods Cases 2016.

Dewilde, J., L. A. Kulbrandstad, and T.-A. Skrefsrud. 2014. "Suksess med integrering i skolen." Hamar Arbeiderblad, November 15.

Engen, T. O., and S. Lied. 2011. "Strategies of Differentiation in a Multi-linguistic, Multi-religious and Multi-cultural School." Teacher Education & Teachers' Work 2 (1): 55–67.

Facebook. 2015. "Helpcentrum." Accessed February 22, 2015. https://www.facebook.com/help/parents.

Freire, P. 1970. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

Hammersley, M., and P. Atkinson. 2007. Ethnography: Principles in Practice. 3rd ed. London: Routledge.

Johansen, P. A., and I. Senneset. 2015. "Ny instrukt om internflyktninger i Afghanistan." Aftenposten, February 6. http://www.aftenposten.no/.

Kitchens, J. 2009. "Situated Pedagogy and the Situationist International: Countering a Pedagogy of Placelessness." Educational Studies 45: 240–261.

Norwegian Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion. 2012. En helhetlig integreringspolitikk: Mangfold og fellesskap. Oslo: The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research. 2007. National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training. Oslo: The Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research.

Øzerk, K. Z. 2008. "Interkulturell danning i en flerkulturell skole. Dens vilkår, forutsetninger og funksjoner." In Fag og danning – mellom individ og fellesskap, edited by P. Arneberg and L. G. Briseid, 209–228. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Pavlenko, A., and A. Blackledge. 2004. "Introduction: New Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts." In Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts, edited by A. Pavlenko and A. Blackledge, 1–33. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Pratt, M. L. 1991. "Arts of the Contact Zone." Profession 91: 33–40.

Rambøll. 2013. Kartlegging av innføringstilbud til elever som kommer til Norge i ungdomsskolealder og som har få års skolegang før ankomst. Oslo: Utdanningsdirektoratet.

Short, D. J. 2002. "Newcomer Programs: An Educational Alternative for Secondary Immigrant Students." Education and Urban Society 34 (2): 173–198.

Soja, E. 2010. Seeking Spatial Justice. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Taguma, M., C. Shewbridge, J. Huttova, and N. Hoffman. 2009. OECD Reviews of Migrant Education. Paris: OECD.

Tjernshaugen, K. 2015. "Politisjef fanget ikke opp de nye signalene om asylbarna." Aftenposten, January 30. http://www.aftenposten.no/.

Top Model. n.d. Accessed February 11, 2015. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Top_Model.

Vertovec, S. 2007. "Super-diversity and Its Implications." Ethnic and Racial Studies 30 (6): 1024–1054.

Vertovec, S. 2009. Transnationalism. London: Routledge.

Welsch, W. 1999. "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today." In Spaces of Culture. City, Nation, World, edited by M. Featherstone and S. Lash, 194–213. London: Sage.