KENYAN CIVIC EDUCATION:
A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT?

by

Wangui Mburu

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

© Copyright by Wangui Mburu 2011
KENYAN CIVIC EDUCATION:
A SOURCE OF EMPOWERMENT?
Doctor of Philosophy, 2011
Wangui Mburu
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
University of Toronto

Abstract

Guided primarily by critical constructivism as the theoretical framework, this dissertation examines the extent to which civic education in Kenya creates dialogic spaces where issues of social difference, peace and democracy are addressed. The participants of the study included four history and government teachers; four Form 1 classes; principals of the two high schools and one curriculum developer. History and government was selected because one of the course’s objectives is to develop responsible and active citizens who would participate in fostering peace and democracy. In this study, peace is conceptualized as the absence of both direct and structural violence, and democracy is conceived, not merely as majority rule, but as exercising one’s opinions where citizens’ contributions influence decisions and have control over public policies that govern their lives.

Using observations, interviews and document analysis, the study focuses on pedagogical practices, educators’ and students’ views about civic education in two public schools in Nairobi. The two sites were selected because the students came from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds and the schools offered co-education. Therefore, the schools’ student demographics provided the kind of social differences that are the focus of this study.

In the analysis, attention was paid to the official curriculum and the way teachers enacted the curriculum to foster peace and social justice. Findings indicate that although the official
curriculum stated the course should foster peace and social justice, the enacted curriculum gravitated towards transmission of facts. Consequently, the enacted curriculum did little to empower students to think critically; it hardly created opportunities to encourage discussion of societal issues that would promote peace and democracy.

Several factors such as prescribed official curriculum, standardized examinations, lack of resources, students’ inadequate English skills, and inadequate teacher training influenced and shaped teachers’ pedagogical practices. Despite this, teachers struggled to exercise their agency by navigating through some of these challenges to achieve what they believed were the objectives of the course. These findings pointed to the need of establishing ways of addressing these challenges in order to make civic education more relevant and meaningful to students and to the Kenyan society.
Acknowledgements

The journey of writing a dissertation can be lonely and emotionally and mentally draining, especially if one does not get support along the way. For me, the support I received throughout this journey made it less so. I cannot identify all the people who supported me, but to them all, I remain forever grateful.

At OISE, I was very fortunate to work with Dr. Diane Gérin-Lajoie as my supervisor. Her ever-present guidance and insights nurtured my scholarly growth, and her contributions to this study made it what it is today. I remain deeply indebted to Dr. Diane Gérin-Lajoie for sharing her talents selflessly with me. I also owe my gratitude to Dr. Kathy Bickmore and Dr. Jim Cummins, who were members of my thesis committee, and from whom I was privileged to learn. Their thoughtful suggestions and constructive criticism helped me rethink, reshape and reorganize my ideas in a way that enhanced the quality of this dissertation.

I would like to show my gratitude to all the educators and all the students who participated in this study. I thank them for their valuable contributions without which this study would not have been accomplished.

I wish to thank Diane Millson and Sharon Roebuck for reading the first draft of this dissertation and for cheering me on. Their words of encouragement came when I needed them the most.

I would also like to thank my friends and the Kenyan community in Toronto. Many of them have taught me to endure battles, academic and otherwise. Their endurance and hard work gave me the courage to continue.
Finally, I would like to thank my family, both in Kenya and Canada. Their support remained steadfast throughout this journey. When emotional strain weighed heavily on me, I always turned to them, but they never complained. They always listened, patiently and lovingly. I would specifically like to thank my daughters, Wairimu and Wanjiku. Years came and went, and all they saw was their mother sitting at the computer reading or typing away. But they understood, and they patiently waited and made do with the little time I afforded them. I thank them for being my daughters, for they gave me the reason not to give up because I had to model courage and endurance.
Dedication

To my parents,
Wanjiku Mburu and Karanja Mburu,
who taught me to
respect all humanity
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements ....................................................................................................... iv  
Dedication ....................................................................................................................... vi  

Chapter One: Introduction and Overview ................................................................. 1  
  Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1  
  Reasons for the Study ................................................................................................. 1  
  Conceptualization of Peace and Democracy ............................................................ 4  
  The Problem and Rationale ....................................................................................... 7  
  Organization of the Dissertation ............................................................................... 12  

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .................................................................. 15  
  Introduction ................................................................................................................. 15  
  Critical Constructivism ............................................................................................. 15  
  Historical background of constructivism .................................................................. 17  
  Critical constructivist pedagogical practices ........................................................... 18  
  Locating critical constructivism within curriculum orientations ............................ 29  
  Schooling and the Role of Civic Education .............................................................. 32  
    The need to teach peace ......................................................................................... 33  
    Schools as instruments of violence ....................................................................... 35  
    Civic education ...................................................................................................... 46  
    Civic education as a tool of empowerment ........................................................... 53  
  Kenyan Educational Context ................................................................................... 55  
    Pre-colonial education (indigenous knowledges) .................................................. 56  
    Colonial formal education .................................................................................... 59  
    Post-colonial education ......................................................................................... 61  
    Teacher education .................................................................................................. 63  
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 64  

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology ............................................. 66  
  Ethnography ............................................................................................................... 66  
  Data Collection Techniques ..................................................................................... 68  
    Document analysis .................................................................................................. 68  
    Observations .......................................................................................................... 68  
    Interviews .............................................................................................................. 70  
  The Study .................................................................................................................. 71  
    Profile of participants ............................................................................................ 72  
  Issues with Data Collection ..................................................................................... 75  
  Gaining Access ......................................................................................................... 77  

Chapter Four: The Official Discourse of Civic Education in Kenya .................... 79  
  Introduction .............................................................................................................. 79  
  Curricular Content .................................................................................................... 80  
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 97
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Making Sense of the Curriculum</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relevance of the History and Government Course</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion of social cohesion, patriotism and good citizenship.</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rights and freedoms awareness</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promoting cultures</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fostering leadership skills</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussing Controversial Social Issues</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enlivening Civic Lessons</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student Voice</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Civic Education in Kenya: Pedagogy in the Classroom</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy in the Classroom</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical strategies: Kapana High School</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical strategies: Lango teachers</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Pedagogical Challenges and Possibilities</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical Challenges</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Invalidation of the history and government course</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Syllabus coverage</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of examinations on teaching</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language of instruction</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material infrastructure</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogical and Curricular Possibilities</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revisiting Civic Education Issues in Kenya</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The principal research question</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implications of the study</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Significance of the study</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggestions for further research</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References ........................................................................................................... 221
Chapter One:  
Introduction and Overview

Two sharply divergent perspectives on education and development have emerged in Africa. In one, education’s role is transformative, liberating, and synthetic. Education must enable people to understand their society in order to change it. Education must be as much concerned with human relations as with skills, and equally concerned with eliminating inequality and practicing democracy. Education must focus on learning how to learn and on examining critically accepted knowledge and ways of doing things. Favoring innovation and experimentation, that sort of education is potentially liberating, empowering, and as such, threatening to established structures of power within and outside the schools. This orientation has remained the minority view…the dominant perspective understands education primarily as skills development and preparation for the world of work. (Samoff, 2003b, p. 432)

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline the main aspects and rationale for conducting a study to examine how Kenyan civic education curriculum deals with questions of social difference as a way of promoting peace, social justice and democracy in society. In particular, the dissertation focuses on pedagogic practices and how teachers’ practices are used as avenues to empower students to be able to determine their own lives and to become active citizens.

Reasons for the Study

My interest in this research was influenced partly by the violence that erupted in Kenya during the country’s general elections in December, 2007/January, 2008. Although there have been waves of violence in Kenya since the first multiparty general elections in 1991/1992 (see p.35), none of the first two waves compared to the violence of 2008 where about 1,000 people lost their lives and about 350, 000 were displaced from their homes (Dagne, 2011). Branch and Cheeseman (2008), Dagne 2011) and Lynch (2008) report that
the 2008 violence was triggered by presidential results that declared the incumbent president, Mwai Kibaki, the leader of Party of National Unity (PNU), the winner of the elections that were believed to have been rigged and flawed. It is worth noting here that the president belongs to the majority ethnic group, the Kikuyu who are viewed as economically and politically powerful. This move angered the supporters of Raila Odinga, the leader of the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). To demonstrate their anger and frustration, ODM supporters, the majority of who were Luo, Odinga’s ethnic group, targeted the Kikuyu, burning their property, driving them out of their homes or killing them (Dagne, 2008). Dagne further notes that in retaliation, the Kikuyu, aided by security forces, took up arms against the Luo and the Kalenjin who were perceived as the ethnic groups supporting the opposition. In the Rift Valley province, for example, Kalenjin vigilante groups targeted Kikuyu settlements because the Kikuyu are perceived as outsiders who went to the Rift Valley Province to dispossess the Kalenjin community of their ancestral land. On the other hand, the Luo were embittered by the fact that since independence, they had never enjoyed political power which all along has been in the hands of either the Kikuyu or the Kalenjin (Dagne, 2008).

Given that political leaders seem to favour members of their own ethnic groups once they are in power, ethnicity is viewed as instrumental in accessing power and winning the elections. This makes it easy for politicians to manipulate the citizenry for their own political interests. The fact that this was the third wave of ethnic violence since 1992, it is necessary to investigate how issues related to social differences are addressed in schools to promote peace and democracy.

Another factor that triggered my interest in this study is the school unrest in more than 300 schools that resulted in massive destruction of property and loss of lives (Ngare,
This kind of violence has also been reported by Ndura (2007) who argues that school violence is symptomatic of more complex issues in the wider society such as pervasive injustice, marginalization and other forms of expression. Ndura (2007) echoes Amutabi (2002) who also maintains that the history of protest in Kenyan universities should be viewed as a reflection of lack of democracy in the school system in particular and in public affairs in general. To Amutabi, violent confrontations result from anti-democratic structures and institutions. My interest was also whetted by the reflections of my lived experiences both as a student and as a teacher in Kenya. My elementary classroom experiences were characterized by verbal and physical abuse by teachers. The culture of Kenyan schools then was to ‘beat’ education into the minds of children. Corporal punishment was supposedly a way of instilling discipline and motivating students to perform well academically. Teachers were never questioned, even in high school. The school socialized learners to become docile subjects, incapable of questioning any form of authority, no matter how unjust it was. My civic education included the memorization of the names of all the cabinet ministers and “The Loyalty Pledge.” Unfortunately, later as a student-teacher in Kenya, I was trained to transmit knowledge to students, not to collaborate with students as they constructed knowledge. As a graduate student, reflecting on my learning/teaching experiences and the violence that erupted in Kenya in January 2008, I wondered if Kenyan teaching practices and curriculum content in the civic education classrooms today promoted peace and tolerance; I wondered if social difference in relation to ethnicity, class, gender, language and religion was explicitly discussed in civic education classes; I wondered if authoritarianism still remained a mechanism of social control in classrooms, leaving students with no avenues of self-expression but violence. I wondered if the violence that seemed to pervade Kenyan
secondary schools was a manifestation of bottled up grievances. My interest to look into the persistent violence transformed into a major question regarding the extent to which one could trace expressions of democratic citizenship in Kenyan schools, and in civic education in particular.

Civic education (which is taught as part of history and government in the Kenyan education system at the high school level) was purposely chosen because the subject’s central goal is to address issues that promote social cohesion and sound democratic citizenship. Civic education, therefore, offers a platform for the explicit discussion of issues that would promote peace, not only in the confines of the classroom, but also in the broader society. Given that the notions of peace and democracy may have various interpretations in diverse contexts, it is necessary to clarify how these notions are conceptualized in this study.

**Conceptualization of Peace and Democracy**

Galtung’s (1964) introduction of the terms “positive peace” and “negative peace” into the field of peace research led to a shift in the way the notion of peace was conceptualized. Galtung argued that peace is two dimensional: “negative peace” (italics in the original) which is the absence of violence, absence of war—and positive peace (italics in the original) which is the integration of human society” (p. 2). Thus, the term peace does not strictly refer to the absence of war (Brock-Utne, 2000; Galtung, 1964, 1969, 1985; Hoivik, 1977). According to Galtung (1969, 1985), peace is not just the absence of direct violence (negative peace), but it is also the absence of indirect violence (positive peace). While direct violence is usually explicit and therefore easy to recognize, indirect violence, which is also known as structural violence, (Galtung, 1969) is sometimes too subtle to recognize. Galtung, who coined the term “structural violence,” explains that this violence is “built into the structure and shows up as
unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (1985, p. 171). Thus, structural violence prevents individuals, groups and societies from reaching their full potential. This kind of violence is structural because it is embedded in the very political and economic organization of people’s social worlds. To Galtung (1985) and Hoivik (1977), structural violence is as harmful as direct violence because it “maims and kills as surely as the bullet and the knife” (Hoivik, 1977, p. 59). Structural violence manifests itself in forms such as discrimination, exploitation and injustice. Therefore, eliminating or minimizing such structural violence would be a step towards social justice, “the egalitarian distribution of power and resources” (Galtung 1969, p. 183). Indeed, this notion of social justice is echoed and further discussed by Young (1990) who contends that social justice means, “the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression” (p. 15) which she categorizes as exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence. To Young, justice is the freedom from oppressive relations; the presence of this freedom and the absence of war would, therefore, translate into real peace. Although these scholars discuss the notion of social justice in a broader sense, this notion would also apply in a civic education classroom. A civic education classroom is part of the students’ social world where power relations are negotiated. It is a social space where students can experience powerlessness, marginalization and other forms of violence.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to critically investigate how Kenyan civic education curriculum addresses issues pertaining to social justice, not just social justice in the classroom, but also social justice in the wider society. Given that the school is more of a replica of what happens in the broader society, the research investigates how social justice or the absence of social justice in the civic education classroom, in the content and in the
teaching practices, reflects what actually takes place in the wider society. If, for instance, ethnic/racial animosity abounded in the wider society, this would also be extended to the schools by school administrators and teachers or students, or by both groups. Similarly, if ethnic/racial differences were recognized and embraced in the wider society, this characteristic would most likely be reflected in the schools. This is well articulated by Apple (2004) who argues that indeed, everyday school practices are linked to economic, social and ideological institutions outside the school walls. It was therefore necessary to investigate what kind of civic education was offered to Kenyan students and its implications. In other words, my objective is to look into how civic education in Kenyan classrooms, through the curriculum content and teaching practices, have either fostered or failed to foster the kind of peace and democracy conceptualized in this study.

The notion of democracy, which has been mainly and erroneously identified with majority rule (Sen, 1999), include “voting and respect for election results, but it also requires the protection of liberties and freedoms, respect for legal entitlements, and the guaranteeing of free discussion and uncensored distribution of news and fair comment” (pp. 9-10). The above conceptualization of democracy, according to Young (2000), and Diamond and Morlino (2004), implies that a good democracy accords its citizens freedom, political equality, and control over public policies; all members have equal influence over debate and decision-making. Thus, the promotion of such democratic practices, like the promotion of peace, would ideally result in social justice.

Given the interconnectedness of the notions of peace and democracy, it would be difficult to discuss one without the other in any civic education class. Therefore, in this research, I examine how the Kenyan civic education curriculum and teaching practices
promote peace and democracy as conceptualized in the above definitions. In most countries, civic education is usually taught under the broad discipline of social studies. In Kenya, for example, civic education is usually taught as part of social studies in elementary schools. In high school, which is the level this research focuses on, civic education is taught as part of history and government (Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), 2002). Consequently, in this study, the terms civic education, social studies and history and government are used interchangeably.

**The Problem and Rationale**

While there is a substantial amount of research on what constitutes quality social studies education in the North American context such as in the works of Apple and King (2004), Banks (2001), Bickmore (2001, 2008), Brighouse (1998), Callan (1994), Chiodo and Martin (2005), Ehrlich (1999), Fine (1993), S. S. Giroux, (2000), Kincheloe (2001), Morris, (2001), and Westheimer and Kahne (2004) among others, in the African context, Kenya in particular, except for one study carried out by Kubow (2007), little has been written on how civic education addresses social issues. In the North American context, for example, Banks (2001) studied his 25 students in a teacher program at a college in the United States for 10 weeks. The course he taught included issues of how knowledge is constructed, how knowledge is related to power and how the mainstream metanarrative privileges some groups and marginalizes others. After observing his students, reading their reflection papers, listening to their discussions and studying their end-of-term class evaluations, he found that students developed a better understanding of race, culture and ethnicity. He therefore points out that good civic education is that which helps students to become citizens in pluralistic nation-states. Citing the United States as one of the pluralistic states, he contends that a new
kind of civic education that enables students to not only acquire national but also cultural and global identifications is a necessity. He further points out that helping students to understand how knowledge is constructed as well as helping students to become knowledge producers is a key ingredient for creating a more humane world given that such empowerment would lead students to participate in civic action. Banks’ views echo findings of a number of studies on civic education in North America.

A study carried out by Chiodo and Martin (2005) in the United States examines the perceptions of eighth and eleventh graders regarding their concept of citizenship. When asked who a good citizen is, the majority of the students indicated that a good citizen was one who helped others; one who obeyed rules; one who respected others and one who was patriotic or loyal. These responses indicated that students’ perception of citizenship was grounded in community service. Students pay almost no attention to the political aspect of citizenship such as voting or occupying a political office. The authors argue that the political aspect of citizenship should also be taught given that political activism is also a tool for helping others in a democratic society. This theme is also highlighted by Ehrlich (1999) who stresses the need to have students go out into the community and learn about the existing problems from which healthy discussions can be elicited. He further notes that it is through combining collaborative activities with problem-solving activities that civic education can become meaningful. His views concur with those of Morris (2001) who suggests that such a community should be created in the classroom through drama. After examining how drama should be used to teach social studies in order to give students a voice, the author argues that using drama provides students with opportunities to think, make decisions and explore content in depth. Thus, drama affords students the opportunity to become active learners,
thereby exhibiting and developing skills in problem solving, decision making and living peacefully as a community through the sharing of ideas and empathizing.

As already mentioned, unlike the North American context, such rich literature that explicitly discusses what quality civic education ought to be is scanty in the African context. Whatever literature there is, it is primarily based on theoretical research which means there is little empirical research on civic education. Furthermore, much of the literature does not focus on civic education. For instance, Altbach (2005), Amutabi (2002), Kerr and Mapanje (2000), Klopp and Orina (2002), Nyamnjoh and Nantang (2000) and Sifuna’s (1997, 2000) writings theorize how governments in Africa make it difficult for students to have meaningful dialogues. Altbach (2005), for instance, chronicles how university students and academics in countries such as Kenya, Algeria and Zimbabwe continue to experience intense government repression. He points out that most African governments muzzle academics because they are the major source of critical thinking and expression. A similar picture is painted by Kerr and Mapanje (2000) who highlight how President Kamuzu Banda of Malawi intimidated and punished academics by forcing them into exile, imprisoning others and deporting foreign academics.

There are, however, a few empirical studies that have examined teachers’ conceptualization of democracy and their teaching practices. Kubow (2007), for example, carried out a comparative study in Kenya and South Africa to investigate how teachers conceptualize the notion of democracy. Findings revealed that teachers’ conceptions are informed by rights-oriented discourses on democracy and their cultural beliefs and values. Her research, however, does not examine teaching practices nor did it investigate the explicit civic education curriculum content. The only study that discusses in-depth teacher-student
classroom practices both at high school level and teacher training college was carried out by Dull (2004) in Ghana. Dull’s study examined how teachers understand the notion of democracy and how democracy has been implemented in the classroom. The author argues that African teachers are not as authoritarian as claimed by many scholars; however, her study findings indicate that Ghanaian teachers’ conceptualization of democracy in high school classrooms meant allowing students to freely express themselves by answering questions from the teacher. Also, class activities were not done in groups nor were questions that would lead to the development of critical thinking skills asked. In addition, hair styles and dressing of teacher trainees were kept in check and all their courses were chosen for them. Although this study sheds some light on the nature of classroom interactions and school practices, it does not examine the content of civic education curriculum nor does it investigate how teachers discuss issues of difference in a civic education classroom. Other studies that focus on classroom practices were carried out by Dunne (2007), Fuller and Snyder (1991), O-saki and Agu (2002) and Tabulawa (1997). Although these studies examined classroom practices, the latter two do so in relation to gender and sexuality. Their findings indicate that gendered and hierarchical organizational patterns are explicitly sustained by both the teachers and the school management. Although these studies do not investigate whether social difference that marginalizes girls is explicitly discussed in the classroom, the glaring differential treatment of girls and boys is indicative of an implicit curriculum that is ever present in the classroom.

The only empirical research that focuses on social difference was done in Ghana by Dei (2004). Dei’s study focuses on teachers' and students' perceptions of difference as pertains to gender, ethnicity, religion and class. The findings reveal that difference and
diversity are denied or suppressed and that participants engage themselves in the dominant discourses of national unity, discourses that are prevalent in most African nations. The study also reveals that there is a repeated pattern in research indicating that members of the dominant group perceive the school as fair to all students. The author argues that by not paying critical attention to difference, students can be differentially engaged, which would lead to inequitable outcomes. Although Dei’s research is rich in detail, it only examines how such social difference is evident in the implicit curriculum. My study, therefore, attempts to fill the gap in the literature by investigating how civic education curriculum, which should be the platform for the discussion of social issues, provides space for such discussions at the high school level. In addition, this study examines how teaching practices make the discussion of these issues possible.

To investigate civic education in Kenya, my study focuses on one main research question: To what extent does civic education curriculum in Kenya create dialogic spaces where issues of social difference, peace, democracy and social justice are addressed? For the purposes of this study, the term curriculum is used to include what teachers teach, how teachers teach and what the school environment is that surrounds the students. Thus, both explicit and implicit civic education curricula are examined. The objectives of my study are as follows:

1. to examine the content of civic education curriculum in regard to the notion of peace and democracy
2. to document teachers’ perceptions on civic education
3. to examine pedagogical practices and
4. to document students’ views about civic education

To achieve these objectives, I have examined:

1. if the curriculum (as presented in the official mandates and text/course-books) presents opportunities for social inclusion of marginalized groups through which social cohesion and equality could be realized; for instance, I investigated what issues the curriculum seems to emphasize and why, and what issues are not emphasized and why.

2. how different teaching practices address issues of social difference, democracy and social justice; in other words, I investigate whether learning activities are done in groups or individually, and whether the activities involve problem-solving tasks. I also investigate whether there are activities that leave room for the expression of different opinions such as debates and discussions.

My empirical study is an examination of the participants’ lived experiences. The techniques used included document analysis, observations and interviews. The study was carried out in Nairobi, Kenya. Being the country’s capital city, Nairobi is home to people from diverse ethnic groups, social classes and religions. Participants were Form I students from two mixed high schools in Nairobi, four civic education teachers, principals of the selected schools and one civic education curriculum developer.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized in eight chapters. In the chapter that follows, I present the literature that informs my study. This includes literature on critical constructivism. I have also given the historical background of critical constructivism and shown its
interconnectedness with critical pedagogy and their divorce from “traditional” pedagogical practices. I have attempted to show the appropriateness of using critical constructivism as my conceptual lens to carry out my study by arguing that, like critical pedagogy, critical constructivism advocates the use of democratic practices that may encourage students’ participation in issues pertaining to democracy in the wider society. In addition, the chapter focuses on the existing literature that illuminates why peace and democracy should be given emphasis in schools. The literature also highlights the contradictory role of the school and portrays the school as both a tool of empowerment as well as a tool of disempowerment. Central in the literature is the discussion of teaching strategies educators can employ in a civic education class to empower students and foster social justice. The context of the study is also presented in this chapter.

In Chapter 3, I present the design and methodology of my study. I have explained that I have used an ethnographic approach and as such, to collect data, I have analyzed documents, carried out interviews and observed participants. Issues related to data collection are also addressed.

Chapter 4 is an examination of curriculum documents that are concerned with the teaching of history and government curriculum. These include history and government syllabus, curriculum policy documents, as well as student textbooks and examinations.

Chapter 5 primarily discusses at length the views of students, teachers, principals and one curriculum developer in relation to history and government. These views are discussed under several themes: relevance of history; discussing controversial issues; student voice and pedagogical activities.
Chapter 6 gives detailed accounts of the observations made in the four classes in the two schools. It also gives an analysis of teachers’ pedagogical practices. Related to this chapter is Chapter 7 which focuses on the challenges that teachers face in their professional lives. It also looks into possibilities of improving teachers’ effectiveness in the history and government class, and Chapter 8, which is the last chapter, is the conclusion of the study. It reviews the study, summarizes the findings and presents implications for future research.
Chapter Two:
Review of the Literature

Introduction

In the introductory chapter, I have shared some of my experiences as a young student in Kenya. I have also talked about my teaching practices that were informed by the kind of teacher education that I had received and how I have come to question part of the education I received and passed on to others. It is this questioning that led me in the direction of critically examining civic education as it is presented and enacted. To do this, it was necessary to look at the issues under study through a critical lens. Thus, in the first section of this chapter, I present and discuss the various concepts that inform my study. In the second section, I present the literature that focuses on the role of civic education. The last section of the chapter is an overview of the educational development in Kenya.

Critical Constructivism

From the broad spectrum of critical educational theory, I use the notion of critical constructivism as my primary theoretical framework. I gravitate more towards critical constructivism because its main focus is knowledge construction. Given that my research is related to how students participate in knowledge construction in order for them to become active citizens, critical constructivism provides an important lens through which one may examine how students construct knowledge in Kenyan classrooms. I also use critical pedagogy, whose educational vision is to work towards justice and equality, because many of its principles are consistent with a critical constructivist approach to education. Thus, while critical constructivism focuses more on students, critical pedagogy focuses more on
deconstructing social processes and challenging educators to make education liberatory. Such a framework attempts to understand issues of, and ask questions about how knowledge is constructed, how it is transmitted and why the given knowledge is transmitted (Kincheloe, 2003, 2005, 2008). In other words, critical constructivism sees the world as socially constructed and asks what forces construct the consciousness, the ways of knowing and seeing of the actors who live in certain contexts (Kincheloe, 2003; Soto, 1999). Thus, it is closely concerned with the role of power in the knowledge construction process; it seeks to divert from the “taken for granted knowledge” to determine what constitutes valid constructions of reality (Soto, 1999). To Kincheloe (1993), valid constructions must be guided by the following principles of critical constructivism:

1. that constructions are consistent with a critical postmodern system of meaning;
2. that constructions are helpful to emancipatory goals;
3. that constructions are internally consistent;
4. that constructions contribute to the ability of humans to function and survive;
5. that constructions are appropriate for inquiry and
6. that constructions avoid reductionism by recognizing the complexity of the situation.

These principles indicate that a critical constructivist goes beyond teaching of content knowledge; that a critical constructivist encourages students’ independent critical thinking. In broader terms, such teaching is seen as a tool of social change (Watts & Jofili, 1998). According to Watt and Jofili, critical constructivists seek to change institutional structures, which could be school settings or any other institutional structures.
Historical background of constructivism.

Although constructivism began with insights from Socrates, Jean Piaget’s work on intellectual growth has been the primary influence on the development of constructivism (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998). Piaget’s cognitive constructivism theory proposes that humans cannot be given information which they immediately understand and use, but they must construct their own knowledge through experience (Kanuka & Anderson, 1998). Today constructivism is often related to the theories of, among others, Piaget, Vygotsky and John Dewey (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). Through their theories, we understand the processes that govern human learning. John Dewey (1939), for example, rejects the notion that teachers focus on repetitive, rote memorization, and instead proposes a method whereby students would engage in real-world, practical workshops in which they would demonstrate their knowledge through creativity and collaboration. The notion of collaboration was taken up by Vygotsky in his socio-interactionist theory (Vygotsky, 1978). He argues that collaborative learning in a team or in a social setting helps learners develop their language skills; thus, activities that a child cannot handle alone can be handled with the help of more skilled partners such as peers or teachers. His theory supports natural, communicative and experiential approaches to learning.

Although constructivism started as a progressive movement among European thinkers, it has evolved over time ‘taking on elements of romanticism, behaviourism, pragmatism, and social activism’ (Ellis, 2004, p. 30). Today constructivism is known by names such as progressive education, discovery learning, incidental learning, and experiential learning (Beck & Kosnik, 2006). With the influence of critical pedagogy which has grown out of theoretical developments such as Latin American philosophies of liberation
and the pedagogy of Paulo Freire (as discussed in McLaren, 1998), constructivism was viewed as student-directed learning devoid of social critique. This led to the emergence of another branch of constructivism: critical constructivism. According to McLaren (1998), constructivism can only become instrumental by challenging dominant forces of knowledge and helping teachers to become active advocates of social transformation. It is this need to question knowledge and power relations that gave birth to critical constructivism.

**Critical constructivist pedagogical practices.**

The central thesis of critical constructivism is that the learner is active in the process of receiving information and building knowledge and understanding, thereby strongly emphasizing the learner’s autonomy in the learning process. Proponents of critical constructivism argue that the approach fosters democracy in the classroom. In fact, when presenting the notion of critical constructivism, Soto (1999) asserts that it seeks to eliminate silences and voicelessness, thereby paving the way for “a greater moral vision of social justice and equity” (p. 110).

From my point of view, given that critical constructivism is under the umbrella of critical educational theory, it overlaps with critical pedagogy which makes the boundary between the two rather blurry. Both perspectives address the issue of voicelessness and the need for dialogue in the classroom in order to allow students to construct knowledge or to become co-authors of knowledge. For example, Freire (1993), a critical pedagogy founder, argues that students are not just empty vessels waiting to be filled. This approach contrasts with the traditional approaches where students are perceived as recipients of what Liu and Matthews (2005) call hard-wired knowledge. This is echoed in the words of Danforth and Smith (2005) who note that such knowledge
resides in the artifacts of the curriculum, in textbooks, computers, and the teacher’s mind. The job of the teacher was to effectively transmit that knowledge to the waiting students. A good student was a passive student who accepted the transfer of authoritative knowledge during the lesson, held on to it in his or her memory, and later demonstrated this knowledge on the examination. (p. 6)

To Freire, Liu and Matthews, and Danforth and Smith, it is critical that students freely express themselves. Voice becomes a social justice issue because when students are rendered voiceless in their classroom, it denies them the right to freedom of speech; it denies them the opportunity to develop as expressive citizens eager to participate fully in nation building; it reduces students to receiving objects. This kind of education is what Freire (1993) refers to as the banking concept of education. According to Freire, “in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (p. 72). Freire shows how “banking education” dehumanizes students by transforming them into ‘containers’ waiting to be ‘filled’ which hampers the development of their critical thinking skills for:

The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world. The more completely they accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them. (p. 73)

If democracy is to be promoted in the classroom, it is imperative that the students’ voice be evident in class interactions. Considering the above, this framework became an essential tool for investigating the presence of student voice in the Kenyan civic education classroom.

Echoing Freire, proponents of critical constructivism argue that educators should not only avoid ‘filling’ students with information, but they should empower learners with critical
faculties so that learners perceive the social and political reality in which they are embedded. For this to happen, the critical constructivist approach encourages active engagement in the learning process, social responsibility and social action (Danforth & Smith, 2005). Thus, the classroom provides a place for creating a democratic community; it becomes a starting point for subverting the traditional versions of education that present education as neutral and objective.

Danforth and Smith’s (2005) view is in line with the beliefs of critical pedagogy scholars such as Apple (1999, 2003, 2000), Freire (1992, 1993, 2005), H. Giroux (1991), McLaren (1989, 1995) and Shor (1993). The scholars assert that traditional versions of education preserve and distribute what is perceived to be knowledge by dominant and powerful groups in society to further their own interests, be they cultural, political or economic. To illustrate this, Apple (2004) contends that a group's ability to define what legitimate knowledge is lies in that group’s power in the larger political and economic arena. Shor (1993) takes this argument a step further by pointing out that, in fact, the political and partisan nature of education is not only about “whose knowledge is most worth” (Apple, 2003, p. 7), but it is also evident in classroom discourse—“in the way teachers and students talk to each other, the questions and statements from the teacher and the freedom students feel when questioning the curriculum” (Shor, 1993, p. 26).

Given that this makes schools a political space, scholars of critical pedagogy and critical constructivists argue that students should be exposed to an education that empowers them to challenge injustices in society. To this end, critical constructivists view education as a powerful agent of social transformation. Thus, education is supposed to be liberatory (Freire, 1993). To Freire, liberatory education raises the consciousness of the oppressed and
makes them question their current location in society. He further explains that dismantling structures of oppression requires progressive educators to speak out about the political and the partisan nature of education that serves the interests of the dominant groups. He therefore advises educators never to buy into the idea that the oppressed are in their rightful place in society, for that is the “immoral discourse of the oppressor,” and turning a deaf ear to it is unethical because it would be supporting forces that produce and reproduce human suffering in society. Freire (1993) further contends that the process of learning cannot be separated from individual empowerment and social transformation. Progressive educators are therefore called upon not only to teach their subjects well, but also to engage learners in critical thinking. Progressive educators should challenge the students so that they do not adapt to the distorted reality of the oppressor, but instead use their critical thinking to question the reality they find themselves in. This view is shared by Kincheloe (1993) who, as already noted, points out that one of the principles of critical constructivism is that valid constructions must promote inquiry and emancipatory goals. This is a major deviation from traditional education.

The rejection of traditional education is, in fact, one significant similarity between critical pedagogy and critical constructivism. Both reject traditional education that teaches students to conform; the kind of education that promotes the development of authority-dependence by teaching students “that education means listening to teachers to tell them what to do and what things mean” (Shor, 1993, p. 28). For this reason, critical constructivists are intimately concerned with teaching practices which inhibit or promote knowledge construction among students, and how teaching practices help students to become critics of existing knowledge. In other words, critical constructivists are interested in interrogating
knowledge construction processes in the classroom. Similarly, critical pedagogy is concerned about knowledge construction; however, its proponents are more concerned about whose knowledge and what knowledge is transmitted and for what purpose. For them, that which is perceived as legitimate knowledge needs to be challenged because it is linked with the group that has economic and political power in society (Apple, 2004). Thus, critical pedagogy goes beyond the classroom walls to unmask how schools distribute knowledge and values through overt and hidden curriculum in order to maintain the status quo (Apple & King, 2004).

Critical pedagogy’s main objective is therefore to empower the masses and to bring about social transformation; it does not limit itself to classroom practices because its proponents believe that “schooling for self and empowerment is ethically prior to questions of epistemology or to a mastery of technical or social skills that are primarily tied to the logic of the marketplace” (McLaren, 1995, p. 30). In sum, the fact that both perspectives concern themselves with knowledge construction and democratic practices in the classroom, it becomes difficult for one to discuss critical constructivism without bringing in principles of critical pedagogy; they are complementary perspectives, with a boundary that is not clearly marked.

Critical constructivism, whose roots are traditional constructivism, uses some of the traditional constructivism principles. For example, proponents of critical constructivism posit that for students to positively and actively engage in meaning-making processes, they should be given the freedom to engage in constructing their own understanding in a supportive social environment. For example, group discussions do not only offer students an excellent opportunity to take charge of their own learning, but they also help them develop confidence when expressing their own ideas in the classroom and outside the confines of the classroom.
Thus, the critical constructivist approach promotes dialogue by creating a classroom environment that emphasizes collaboration and exchange of ideas. Students learn how to articulate their ideas clearly as well as to collaborate on tasks effectively by sharing in group projects and debates. Furthermore, students learn to ‘negotiate’ with others and to evaluate their contributions in a socially acceptable manner. Such skills are not only essential in the classroom, but also essential in the real world because students will always be exposed to a variety of experiences in which they will have to negotiate. To critical constructivists, such freedom that allows dialogue to happen is viewed as allowing democracy to take root in the students’ world. Critical constructivists view such a space as a fertile ground where students can learn to question and develop their critical thinking skills. This is yet another entry point created to examine if civic education activities given to students in Kenya are meaningful and if they prepare students to become expressive and democratic citizens.

Critical constructivism embraces a learner-centred approach where the teacher has to adopt the role of a facilitator. Although this is yet another principle of traditional constructivism, critical constructivists embrace it because it provides a means through which some power is transferred from the teacher to the student; they view a learner-centred approach as one with a liberatory mission, at least within the classroom. According to Ellis (2004), this position is rooted in the philosophies of Rousseau who rejected the imposition of traditional authority on the developing learner. Ellis further notes that individuals have to think for themselves, to discover the world through experience and to bring out all their innate capacities. Chomsky (1971) defends Rousseau’s learner-centred approach by arguing that the teacher should be regarded as a facilitator of personal growth and a protector of the individual from the controlling and corrupting power of the state. Thus, the role of the
teacher is to plan and organize the learning process. He or she is a guide who shows direction and gives cognitive support to learners by making suggestions, challenging learner’s creativity, encouraging independent thinking and assisting students to develop problem-solving and problem-posing skills. At the same time, the teacher is expected to remain open-minded to learn from the students just as students learn from him or her. As the teacher shares knowledge with the students, he or she serves as a catalyst that encourages everyone to become engaged, to become an active participant in learning (hooks, 1994), and as students construct their own knowledge, they compare it with that of the teacher and peers in order to get new versions of truth. In such a classroom, the teacher and the students are constantly engaged in a dialogue of meaning. This kind of dialogue opens up channels of thought and communication that go in both directions. This dialogue does not make the teacher lose his or her respect, but respect becomes reciprocal. Freire (1992) clearly explains this by pointing out that

Dialogue between teachers and students does not place them on the same footing professionally; but it does mark the democratic position between them. Teachers and students are not identical, and this for countless reasons. After all, it is a difference between them that makes them precisely students or teachers. Were they simply identical, each could be the other. Dialogue is meaningful precisely because the dialogical subjects, the agents in the dialogue, not only retain their identity, but actively defend it, and thus grow together. Precisely on this account, dialogue does not level them, does not "even them out," reduce them to each other. Dialogue is not a favor done by one for the other, a kind of grace accorded. On the contrary, it implies a sincere, fundamental respect on the part of the subjects engaged in it, a respect that is violated, or prevented from materializing by authoritarianism. Permissiveness does the same thing, in a different, but equally deleterious way. (pp. 116-117)

Sharing authority with students is a step toward preparing students for leadership roles and power sharing. If teachers are authoritarian, they develop passive citizens, not actors in a democracy. Using this lens, therefore, it is necessary to examine whether students
are afforded the opportunity to share, construct and reconstruct knowledge, or whether authoritarianism reigns in Kenyan civic education classrooms, making it impossible for students to critically engage in discussions.

Given that the critical constructivist approach encourages learners to learn how to think and understand, it is possible to posit that when educators make education a dialogical process (Freire, 1992, 1993) they create spaces for students to feel comfortable expressing their ideas; spaces where students will not fear losing face because they know the teacher respects their ways of knowing. The classroom becomes a place where students feel comfortable to share their lived experiences. It becomes a place where students concentrate on sharing knowledge rather than concentrating on rote memorization. Using this theoretical approach has allowed me to question the extent to which students contribute to the learning process by sharing their knowledge.

To involve students more in the learning process, critical constructivists believe that learners must be engaged in activities that are authentic in order to make learning purposeful. Although this is yet another principle of traditional constructivism, proponents of critical constructivism view it as a gateway for discussing social issues in the wider society that are oftentimes masked, making it difficult for students to critically examine the world of which they are a part. For critical constructivists, authentic activities are what Portelli and Vibert (2002) refer to as a “curriculum of life,” a curriculum “that makes explicit the kinds of issues usually associated with the hidden curriculum.” The importance of such learning is supported by John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey (1914) who point out that “the more closely and more directly the child learns by entering into the social situations, the more effective the knowledge he gains” (p. 63). The classroom is an excellent space for helping students to
connect what they have learnt in the classroom with what actually happens outside the school. For example, to practice democracy, teachers need to relinquish some of their authority to students. I was therefore curious to know if teachers do relinquish some of their authority in Kenyan civic education classrooms, or whether students take part in decision-making processes.

Finally, the critical constructivist approach emphasis is on learner self-assessment. Proponents of critical constructivism argue that if any assessment is to be done, it should not be done to rank students but to assess in order to identify students’ strengths and weaknesses and to nurture critical inquiry and problem solving. Littky (2004), a constructivist who argues schools should reduce testing, notes that ‘our addiction to testing is blinding us to what we believe in our hearts are the important lessons our children should learn’ (p. 5). Is this true of Kenyan civic education? Findings reported by Chapman and Snyder (2000) indicate that items in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and the Kenya Certificate of Secondary School (KCSE), which are national examinations, often assess lower-level skills such as recall and recognition. Consequently, teachers drill students on what is likely to be assessed. In such a situation, one wonders whether important issues such as those pertaining to social justice are overlooked due to high stakes examinations.

This literature indicates that critical constructivists recognize that knowledge is socially constructed and that the context in which learning occurs is central to the learning itself. Indeed, the notion of knowledge as being a social construct is the central thesis of critical constructivism because it is intimately related to the issues of power and powerlessness in the classroom and in the broader society. Apple (1999, 2000, 2003, 2004) reminds us that schools act as agents of cultural and ideological hegemony in the sense that
the knowledge that is usually transmitted is that of the dominant groups. Given that these groups define what legitimate knowledge is, they are often guaranteed social mobility and power in the broader society while the subordinate groups are pushed to the fringes. Adding that schools are usually linked through their everyday practices to other powerful institutions in other hidden ways, he cautions that people must learn to question whatever knowledge is presented to them and to unmask the hidden curriculum, the unintended outcomes of the schooling process that reproduce social inequalities. For him, these questions are fundamental to democratic education: “Who benefits from the way education is organized? Whose knowledge and ways of knowing are considered legitimate or ‘official’? Whose knowledge is not? What is the relationship between the inner world of schools and the larger society?” (Apple, 1999, p. 3). Thus, to critical constructivists, it is imperative students be encouraged to question and to critique any forms of knowledge presented to them as the only legitimate knowledge. It is by so doing that students will be able to question their social locations and learn to push the boundaries that have been mapped out for them. This is well summarized by Apple (2000):

One of the things a serious education should do is not only to provide us with the necessary tools to do something decent with our lives, but to “destabilize” our ordinary understandings of our own places in the larger society. (p. xiv)

If education is meant to empower students to question the world they are living in, is this reflected in the teaching practices and the civic education curriculum in Kenya? Given that critical constructivism is an approach that gives students the opportunity to exercise their freedom in learning, I investigated whether this freedom is accorded in civic education classrooms in Kenya or whether civic education content and teaching practices orient students to become passive citizens who do not question social injustices. In other words,
does civic education in Kenyan schools, in McLaren’s (1989, p. 152) words, “empower students to gain a sense of control over their destinies rather than feel trapped by their social status?” Progressive teachers can inject humane teaching practices by using constructivist practices and applying critical pedagogy principles in order to foster freedom in the classroom as well as in the larger society. This is clearly articulated by hooks (1994):

I add my voice to the collective call for renewal and rejuvenation in our teaching practices. Urging all of us to open our minds and hearts so that we can know beyond the boundaries of what is acceptable, so that we celebrate teaching that enables transgressions—a movement which makes education the practice of freedom. (p. 12)

Thus, critical constructivism provides a lens through which to investigate whether Kenyan civic education empowers students by sharpening their critical faculties in order to help them understand and question the socio-political, prescribed realities they are in. The framework provides an entry point for investigating whether Kenyan civic education is a tool for social change or whether it invalidates any knowledge that might shake up the status quo. Specifically, I have examined what kind of curriculum content is transmitted to the students and whether students are engaged in critiquing the content given to them in order to create their own meanings. As well, I have examined whether teaching practices allow students to become co-producers of knowledge whereby they are allowed to pose critical questions regarding the knowledge that is presented in the lessons. In addition, I have observed how pedagogical practices foster or inhibit the discussion of controversial issues related to gender, ethnicity, class and religion. Thus, examining curriculum content and teaching practices helped me understand the extent to which civic education in Kenya plays a part or fails to play a part in fostering the knowledge skills and values necessary to promote a democratic
29

political culture (Harber, 1990), a political culture that would bring social transformation and, hopefully, some peace.

Given that critical constructivism also encourages the need to challenge power relations in the classroom and the muting of students’ voices, I have utilized the conceptual framework to investigate the presence (or the absence) of discussions on social difference issues in relation to ethnicity, gender, class, culture, disability and religion in the Kenyan civic education class and the degree of autonomy given to students to be able to openly discuss these issues. In my study, the following was my main research question: To what extent does civic education curriculum in Kenya create dialogic spaces where issues of social difference, peace, democracy and social justice are addressed?

**Locating critical constructivism within curriculum orientations.**

In summary, critical constructivism advocates a rejection of the more traditional methods of teaching and a move towards progressive pedagogical practices. This move from teaching content knowledge to teaching to foster independent critical thinking and finally teaching to transform social structures is clearly described and summarized by Miller and Seller (1990) in what they call curriculum orientations. According to these authors, pedagogical practices are based on three curriculum orientations: transmission, transactional and transformational.

The transmission orientation, from which constructivism has divorced itself, views core knowledge and skills as fixed. Therefore, knowledge can be passed on from generation to generation, by the teacher who is seen as the expert. The classroom is viewed as a place where important information is transmitted to the students by the teacher. The teacher selects all the learning resources. Students do not make classroom rules, but are expected to follow
the rules made for them. Because the objective of this orientation is to have students master the content, teachers use lectures, reading, writing notes and drill activities as their teaching strategies. In addition, assessments are aimed at assessing mastery of the subject content. To critical constructivists, the transmission orientation does not develop students’ critical thinking skills; instead, it creates passive citizens.

Unlike the transmission orientation, transaction orientation views education as a dialogue between the student and the curriculum in which the student reconstructs knowledge through the dialogue process (Miller & Seller, 1990, p. 6). Thus, the transactional orientation reflects “utilitarian” tendencies and views knowledge as something that is changing. Learning goals are achieved through dialogue, problem-solving or through other forms of inquiry such as projects. The classroom environment is viewed as a space where problems can be discussed between the teacher and students. Classroom resources are selected by students with the assistance of the teacher. Class rules are usually discussed and worked out between the teacher and the students and desks are organized in groups to encourage student interaction and dialogue. Given that problem solving is at the core of this orientation, teaching activities and strategies associated with this orientation include group-enquiry projects, decision-making approaches and moral dilemmas of real-life issues. Assessments are based on the application of cognitive skills processes such as resolving a conflict. Evaluation of students’ work is concerned with the steps followed in the process and the actual product.

The transformation orientation, which focuses on development of the whole person and social change (Miller & Seller, 1990), is liberatory. According to Miller and Seller, the orientation integrates “teaching students’ skills that promote personal and social
transformation, a vision of social change, a movement toward harmony with the environment” and acknowledges “a spiritual dimension to the environment” aimed at developing respect and reverence for the ecological system (p. 8). The orientation also acknowledges the need to make students aware of the political, cultural and social aspects of their society and become active participants. Like in the transaction orientation, students and teachers are actively engaged in all phases of learning and knowledge is constructed through a dialogic process and collaborative enquiry. The teacher’s role is that of guide or facilitator. The classroom environment is viewed as a space for discussion and enquiry. Classroom resources are selected by students but with the teacher’s assistance. Class rules are worked out by students and teachers and desks are arranged in groups to allow interaction. The orientation moves beyond the classroom and brings into the class discussions on socio-political issues present in the wider society. Thus, teaching activities encourage students to critically examine socio-political themes that may lead to social transformation. Assessment practices are based on personal growth and social awareness. Consequently, the use of journals and portfolios is encouraged.

Thus, critical constructivism embraces both the transaction and transformation orientations, which are also embraced by critical pedagogy advocates for they offer democratic practices that may lead toward peace and social justice both in the classroom and the wider society. Because democratic practices are connected with the promotion of peace and social justice, I have used critical constructivism as the lens through which I examined the presence of, or the absence of, democratic practices in history classes in Kenya. I have also reviewed the literature regarding the role of civic education in schools.
Schooling and the Role of Civic Education

My study draws from the literature on the paradoxical role of education, both as a tool for positive social change and as a tool for maintaining oppressive structures. Positive social change here is conceptualized as the dismantling of oppressive social structures that make attainment of peace almost impossible.

Although my study is centred on the Kenyan civic education, I have incorporated North American concepts because, in my point of view, the notions of peace and social justice are universal concepts, socio-political dynamics that play out in different contexts notwithstanding. Furthermore, there are often commonalities of oppression irrespective of the diversity or the circumstances of the oppressed. For example, while North American literature may discuss social justice issues in relation to race, in the African context, literature may discuss injustices in relation to ethnicity. Farrell (2003) makes a similar point when he argues that an injustice such as inequality of access to education is universal. For Farrell, “discrimination at the door of primary school in poor nations simply operates in richer countries at a later point in children’s lives” (p. 158). I have also incorporated North American notions of peace and democracy because nations are now inescapably globally interconnected and cultural boundaries are increasingly becoming blurry. This is clearly articulated by Dei, Asgharzadeh, Bahador, and Shahjahan (2006) who note that “globalization instills in us a consciousness of the world as a single place in which economic technological and cultural interconnectivities and interdependencies are becoming more salient and more visible than ever before” (p. 186). Despite the fact that the trend of globalization has grossly affected non-Western ways of living and knowing (Dei et al., 2006), schools should prepare students to become effective global citizens while at the same
time affirming students’ identities and validating their languages and cultures in order to help them engage in the values of their nations; people should strike a balance between global and national values (Banks, 2001). In the Kenyan context where there are many ethnic groups speaking at least 42 languages, it is important to validate students’ cultures and languages instead of discouraging them from speaking their languages in an effort to promote national cohesion and to mould “international” citizens. Thus, using North American concepts to study the Kenyan context, to a large extent, is a global reality that people should learn to live with, given that many people have become cultural border-crossers due to their multiple identities.

\textit{The need to teach peace.}

There is voluminous literature that emphasizes the need to push for peace in a world that is tainted with so much violence (Bickmore, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2000; Goldstein, 2005; Harber, 1996, 2004; Harber & Sakade, 2009; Harris, 2004; Jackson, 2001; Klopp, 2001; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2005; Waghid, 2004, 2007). Waghid (2004), for example, suggests it is imperative students learn being compassionate as part of citizenship education because compassion would eliminate some of the violence that is experienced both in schools and in the wider society. In a similar vein, Bickmore (2006) points out that it is important to have students from diverse cultural backgrounds voice their views on how to resolve conflicts and have them delve into the real world of social and political conflicts and injustices.

Speaking on global peace, Brock-Utne (2000) asserts that equality of rights and equal power sharing for every member of society would make the world a more peaceful place, at both local level and global levels. She notes that the globalized market economy is changing social structures, causing structural violence where some people become poorer while others
grow richer which in turn leads to less peaceful societies. She therefore proposes schools to promote an education that would include the study of the growth of inequalities between the developed and the developing nations, inequalities between nations and within nations. Such education, she argues, would not only develop critical and analytical minds, but would also promote cooperative ways of working together to solve socio-political problems.

In developing countries where direct violence abounds, most conflicts involve political violence between factions in a single state (Jackson, 2001). Jackson further notes that since the 1980s, the continent of Africa has been the most conflict-prone region in the world. The root cause of most of this violence stems from marginalization of some ethnic groups. This is supported by Ukiwo (2007) and Osaghae (2005) who explain how ethno-regional domination of the public sector breeds violent conflicts in Nigeria. In fact, Johnson and Stewart (2007) note that ethnicity has gained dominance as a major cause of political divisions and violent conflicts. He notes that where seeds of ethnic hatred thrive, education is implicated because its content might be designed to integrate citizens or to divide them. No other case is more telling than the genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1990s where, even today, people have to continually uproot seeds of discord that are deeply entrenched in the region. According to a UNICEF report, the Belgian government that colonized Rwanda taught the Tutsi to regard themselves as a ruling class while the Hutus were trained for manual jobs (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000). The authors further contend that such unequal distribution of education excludes groups from full participation in the socio-economic life of a country. Thus, it was the marginalization of the Hutus by the Tutsis that led to ethnic hatred and when the Hutus came into power, they oppressed the Tutsis so much so that many sought refuge in the neighbouring countries. The escalation of this marginalization and
discrimination eventually led to the 1994 genocide that left almost one million people dead. Ethnic “cleansing” has become common in most African states. Other well-known cases occurred in Somalia and Sudan.

Nevertheless, in this troubled continent there are countries that are relatively peaceful, and Kenya was one of them until violence erupted in January 2008 during the country’s general elections. This was not the first time there was political violence in Kenya, however. Such violence involving displacement of innocent people started in 1991/1992 during the first multiparty general elections (Klopp, 2001). Moi, the then president, had alienated the Kikuyu who are the majority ethnic group and the Luo, and for him to remain in power, he looked for support from pastoralist groups—his own ethnic group, the Kalenjin, and the Maasai to terrorize the Kikuyu and drive them from the land the Kikuyu had bought from the Maasai, the Kalenjin and other ethnic groups (Klopp, 2001). The author reports that the Kikuyu were hacked to death by people they knew. Those who managed to escape, their houses were burnt down. A repeat of the clashes happened in 1997 and 2002 during the general elections. However, none of the previous violence could match the magnitude of the January 2008 violence. Although this violence was largely associated with the elections, one is left wondering if the cause of the bloodshed was deeply rooted in the structural violence the citizenry had been subjected to for decades.

*Schools as instruments of violence.*

There is a substantial body of literature that chronicles how schools have continued to commit acts of structural violence. As already mentioned, acts of structural violence are embedded in social structures and include exploitation, powerlessness, marginalization, and cultural imperialism (Young, 1990) and other forms of violence that are not directly inflicted
(Galtung, 1969; Hoivik, 1977; Salmi, 1993). Structural violence is closely related to what Bourdieu (1977/1991) refers to as symbolic violence. Echoing Bourdieu, Schubert (2002) points out that symbolic violence happens when a group imposes meanings as legitimate by masking the power relations through which the group is able to dominate other groups’ ways of knowing. According to Schubert, “the ways of being in the world are…potentially limitless, and to impose one way among many as the only, correct, or right way is to engage in symbolic violence” (p. 1092). For example, institutions endow an individual or individuals with power through whom they (institutions) commit acts of violence (Bourdieu, 1991). An illustration of such symbolic violence is whereby schools define what is acceptable and what is not acceptable and teachers and school administrators reinforce this by punishing those who defy the rules. Such violence often goes unnoticed because it is embedded in everyday occurrences. Due to its nature, this kind of violence is able to create subordination and social hierarchies that are not easy to eradicate.

In a school setting, for example, teachers may be authoritarian by which they may deny students the opportunity to give their opinion in school matters that concern them. Such violence is illustrated in the works of Anyon (1995, 2005), Apple (2003), Applebaum, (2004, 2005), Banks (2001, 2002), Darling-Hammond (2007), Kozol (1991), Nieto (2002) and Sleeter (1996). These scholars document how racial minorities, especially black and Latino students are subjected to social injustices in American schools. For example, a study carried out by Anyon (1995) reveals how professional culture of many teachers and administrators in inner-city schools is dehumanizing and abusive toward the student population whose families have no voice due to their economic situation. Elsewhere, Anyon (2005) highlights the failure of the US federal and regional educational policies to render high-quality institutions
in poor urban neighbourhoods, allowing the current school policies to work against the
development and achievement of poor urban students. Decrying these acts of violence,
Asante (2005) points out that,

> If we take the ethical and moral purposes of education seriously, we will look
much more carefully at the assumptions, as well as the practices and policies
that are detrimental to Black achievement. The task of educating black
children is difficult in the context of traditional American cultural ways
because the oppression and degradation of black people are embedded in the
social fabric of American life, culture and ideology. (p. 62)

Asante’s words are echoed by Darling-Hammond (2007) who illuminates the
persistent inequality in school performance in the United States and argues that this points to
the educational inequalities in the country. The author further argues that the level of
education that people of colour acquire cannot get them any jobs, forcing them to resort to
undesirable means for their survival. To her, this is indicative of the existing educational
problems such as inadequate access to the kinds of teachers and other resources that could
enable young people to gain the skills to become gainfully employed. More violence is
reported by Nieto (2002) who notes that schools (teachers and school administrators) not
only deny minority students the chance to advance academically, thus relegating them to the
margins of society, but they also strip them of their languages and cultures. The picture these
scholars paint is what Kozol (1991) describes as savage inequalities as he illuminates
extremes of wealth and poverty in the United States. To guarantee the status quo is
maintained, Apple (2003) and Applebaum (2005) contend that discourses such as colour
blindness and meritocracy pervade educational institutions. To Apple (2003) and Applebaum
(2005), the discourses of colour blindness and meritocracy continue to mask the systemic
oppression that people of colour experience; such discourses are tools to silence dialogue on
race issues in North America. Unlike North America where discourses of colour blindness
are prevalent, in Kenya the discourse of meritocracy and the denial of differential treatment of students along ethnic lines are prevalent in educational institutions. Such discourses that conceal oppression are also raised by Sleeter (1996) who argues that education in the United States, multicultural education in particular, is treated as therapy for prejudice and stereotyping and thus fails to address broader political issues such as structural and social inequalities that stand in the way of student achievement (Nieto, 2002). To counter such masking of injustices, Banks (2001) argues that education should assist students to understand the ways in which knowledge is constructed and how knowledge production is directly related to the location of the knowledge producers in social, political and economic contexts in the society.

Systemic injustices in Canadian schools have also been documented (Battiste, 2000; Carr & Klassen, 1997; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Dei, 2000; The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP, 1996). Battiste (2000), for example, illuminates these injustices by contending that in Canada, First Nations, Africans and other visible minorities receive similar unfair treatment which includes oppression in the wider society and through school practices. Also, a report by RCAP highlights how school practices continue to devalue the culture and languages of the Aboriginal people. This 1996 report notes:

There is an overwhelming lack of support for Aboriginal identities, no Aboriginal high school teachers, only limited curriculum dealing with contemporary Aboriginal languages, cultures, history and political issues; an emphasis on intellectual cognitive achievement at the expense of spiritual, social and physical development; and the marginalization of youth in decision-making about their education. The result is that the schooling system typically erodes identity and self-worth. Those who continue in Canada’s formal education system told us of regular racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through encounters with racism, the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution.
Further accounts by Cummins (1998, 2001) chronicle how minorities—Francophones in Ontario, First Nations and other minority groups—have experienced cultural and linguistic violence. He further notes that this violence is embedded in curriculum materials and educators’ expectations of students, especially black students. Cummins (2001) contends that this structural violence may eventually lead to massive school failure. In fact, some students of African descent show contempt for the curriculum because it usually excludes them or portrays them negatively (Solomon & Brown, 1998). Echoing these scholars, Dei (2000) asserts that structural barriers that are found in Canadian schools must be dismantled in order to have an open and equal opportunity school system, with effective social outcomes for all students. To Dei, for this to be realized, whiteness which is a key component in the maintenance of domination must be examined.

Speaking of injustices in the Australian context, Deutsch (2006) explains this kind of violence/oppression in the processes of everyday life is embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols in the assumptions underlying institutions and rules. In most pluralistic contexts, dominant groups not only marginalize minority groups economically, but they also place their own languages, cultures, religious beliefs and practices at the centre stage, pushing the languages, cultures and religious beliefs of minority groups to the periphery. Defining this cultural invasion as hegemony, Gramci (1971) explains that hegemonic societies, through institutions such as schools, teach minority groups to internalize their dominant beliefs and ideologies. Education is thus used as a mechanism through which the dominant group implicitly reinforces its rule and maintains power.

These forms of violence are not only found in North America and other developed nations such as Australia. In Africa, for example, scholars continue to decry the abuse of
power, both in schools and in the wider society (Chege, 2006; Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2000; Dunne, 2007; Harber, 1996, 2002, 2004; Harber & Sakade, 2009; Lumumba-Kasongo, 2005; Marcucci, Johnstone, & Ngolovoi, 2008; O-saki and Agu, 2002; Sifuna, 2000; Tabulawa, 1997; Wane, 200). This violence is highlighted by Harber (1996, 2004) who notes that African schools themselves have often been violent places in terms of being sites of wider political conflicts and global inequalities and in terms of their role as agents of structural violence. The author further notes that African schools have been essentially authoritarian institutions with power firmly in the hands of the principals and the teachers. He contends that in many countries in Africa, schooling is harmful to children and their wider societies because children are socialized to accept the socio-political reality they are embedded in no matter how oppressive it is. He further argues that given that most African governments are authoritarian, schools tend to promote authoritarian values and practices such as hierarchical communication, discouragement of critical thought, moulding of passive citizenry and use of indoctrination to control the population and maintain compliance and obedience.

Noting that indoctrination “is the inculcation of values and beliefs as truths,” Harber (2004, p. 23) points out that an authoritarian society often uses the school to promote its ideology. He exemplifies this by arguing that through indoctrination, schools in Rwanda inculcated seeds of discord where Hutu teachers denounced Tutsi children to the militia in the 1994 genocide or hacked them to death themselves. However, this does not mean only authoritarian societies use the school to promote their ideology. All governments, including “democratic” ones use the school to further their own interests. In the African context, corporal punishment has, for decades, been used as a way of teaching students compliance. This observation is made by Harber (2002, 2004) who reports that in countries like Nigeria,
Botswana and Zimbabwe, teachers and school administration subject students to corporal punishment. Using corporal punishment as a control tactic has two dire consequences: it scars students psychologically and creates docile and inactive citizenry. When schools use force to exert control over students, they indeed become instruments of violence. It is therefore not surprising when Foucault (1977) finds a striking resemblance between schools and other institutions that control people. He writes:

Is it surprising the cellular prison, with its regular chronologies, forced labour, its authorities of surveillance and registration, its experts in normality, who continue and multiply the functions of the judge, should have become the modern instrument of penalty? Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, hospitals, which all resemble prisons? (pp. 227-228)

A study by Tabulawa (1997), which examines pedagogical classroom practices in Botswana, indicate that although the government urges teachers to use more democratic learner-centred methods, teachers find it difficult to relinquish their authority, which includes the use of corporal punishment. Tabulawa (1997) points out that authoritarianism is deeply rooted in the missionary colonial education which was aimed at producing a passive workforce to occupy subordinate positions in factories and offices. He further notes that this kind of education where students receive information without questioning found fertile ground in Africa because African traditional education, like many other “traditional” education systems in the world, was just as authoritarian—“social hierarchy and interpersonal relations have always been regulated by a rigid paternalistic structure” (Tabulawa, 1997, p. 195). Thus, child-rearing practices dominate children; children are usually expected to listen and not to be listened to. These unquestioned beliefs and practices are carried into the classrooms. It is then not surprising that in Tabulawa’s study, teachers describe students’ role in the classroom as acquiring and assimilating knowledge while they
describe the teacher’s role as the imparting of the given knowledge. These findings concur with those of Fuller and Snyder (1991) who investigated teacher-student interactions in 154 junior secondary schools and 127 primary schools in Botswana. Their findings indicate that students only participate when giving choral answers, and whenever teachers pose questions, which are usually closed-ended. The study also indicates that students rarely ask any questions of their own. This kind of education is unjust because when individuals are subjected to feelings of powerlessness, then that may translate to violence (Young, 1990). Moreover, if the school does not prepare students to recognize injustices and pose questions, the implications are that the school prepares students to remain passive even when their rights are violated. Shor (1993) argues that students should be allowed to ask questions because it is through problem-posing that they learn to question answers rather than merely answering them. This is echoed by Portelli (1993) who argues that “denying awareness or discouraging students from seriously looking at other possibilities or counter-evidence (even if this is done unintentionally on the part of the teacher) is miseducative” (p. 354).

Other studies indicate that most African classrooms are replete with violence, especially against girls. A study carried out by O-saki and Agu (2002) that investigated classroom interactions in primary schools in Tanzania exposed differential treatment based on gender. The scholars point out that teachers bring into the classroom their cultural beliefs regarding gender rights. In such cases, teachers reinforce gender stereotyping, which favours boys during the teaching process and during extra-curricular activities. The study indicates that boys tend to be asked more questions because teachers perceive boys are intellectually more active. In addition, boy prefects are given more power than the girls who only work as assistant prefects. Abusive language and corporal punishment are prevalent. Worse still, girls
do house-hold chores such as cooking for teachers while other students are learning, which leaves the girls vulnerable to sexual abuse by male teachers, an aspect, sadly, that seems prevalent in African schools.

One study that graphically describes sexual abuse against girls was carried out in Kenya by Chege (2006). She notes that although many of the girls and boys complain that teachers used violence, the girls feel disempowered most due to sexual violence by male teachers. The author further reports that even when girls report sexual violence to the head-teachers who are male, they dismiss the cases, leaving the girls feeling helpless and open to further abuse. In fact, the girls in this study report that when they refuse to respond to sexual advances by teachers, teachers punish them by giving them low marks. On the other hand, boys report that while they are brutally caned by male teachers, the teachers refrained from beating girls in exchange for sexual favours. This sexual violence seems to be part of everyday reality for many school girls. Kiyimba (2005) argues that this violence is deeply entrenched in the lives of the students because gender relations are mapped out right from birth. She points out that portrayal of boys and girls in the oral literature of the Baganda of Uganda, for example, impacts on gender relations and the impressions in the literature lay down rules of social behaviour that determine how boys and girls perceive each other in the socio-economic and political arena. Thus, the unequal gender relations are inculcated in childhood and they are difficult to eradicate.

A similar observation is reported by Kubow (2007) and Stambach (2000) who point out that children in Kenya are assigned chores according to their gender which results in parents allowing boys to play while girls assumed duties in the home.
Further findings of violence were reported by Dunne (2007) who carried out an exploratory study in junior secondary schools in Botswana and Ghana to explore how the institution of schooling is gendered. The study indicates that despite the official policy that disallowed corporal punishment, caning continues unabated. Moreover, class participation is also used to marginalize, embarrass and degrade girls. In addition, boys routinely intimidate girls and teachers do nothing to stop it. Consequently, most girls remain silent for fear of being embarrassed by either the teachers or the male students.

Studies indicate that differential treatment is not only experienced by female students but also experienced by female educators. Wane (2005), for example, points out that in Kenya, while most male teachers teach at the high school level, most women teach preschool or lower primary children. The few males found at lower primary level are usually principals or deputy principals. These unequal gender relations are also evident in the everyday teacher-student interactions because, as Wane points out, male teachers are often associated with authority and power. In a similar vein, Dei (2004) notes that gender functions to demarcate student life chances and adds that the absence of female teachers in institutions of higher learning in Ghana is not only indicative of differential hiring standards, but it is also indicative of how universities limit the pool of female students to enter universities. Such systemic barriers that continue to marginalize women are deeply rooted in the cultural values and go unquestioned because they are taken as the norm.

This violence is not only found within the confines of classroom walls, but also prevalent outside school walls. Marcucci et al. (2008), for instance, highlight how inequalities have continued to be reproduced through education in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The authors argue that opportunities for students from poor backgrounds to access
education are minimal. Given that the poor cannot afford to pay private education fees, students from privileged background who can even afford fees in foreign universities take the opportunities. This inequality is worsened by the fact that foreign languages that are used as the media of instruction benefit the children of the elite who live in urban areas. Given that the children of the rich have access to the languages of instruction as in the case of Kenya, rural children and those that live in poverty-ridden urban areas have little access to the language of instruction. As a result, they continue to perform poorly academically; thus, foreign languages become a tool of promoting inequalities in African societies. Cleghorn (2005) reports that this is a widespread problem in English-speaking African countries.

Furthermore, students’ ethnicity may be a ticket to either marginalization or success. A study carried out by Dei and Asgharzadeh (2005) in Ghana which looks into the challenges of inclusive education indicate that students experienced discrimination from teachers who are not from their ethnic groups. Besides, students from some ethnic groups reported that they experience stinging stereotyping from other students. In Malawi, languages of minority groups were banned from all schools except English and Chichewa, which was the then president’s language (Kerr & Mapanje, 2000).

As documented evidence continues to expose how schools are instrumental in promoting social injustice, so does documented evidence that highlight how schools could be instrumental in promoting social justice. The role of the school, therefore, remains paradoxical. This is illustrated by Burns (2002) who traces the double role of education as a positive and a negative change agent by citing cases where education is geared towards the creation of passive citizenry. He argues that in such cases, moral education is emphasized and adds that where education is a positive change agent, schools create critical subjects.
As the literature below indicates through the teaching of civic education, schools can be instruments of empowerment, rather than tools of injustice. This can be better understood by first discussing how civic education is conceptualized.

**Civic education.**

In a world so steeped in political and institutional violence, it is important to teach civic education. However, there is one crucial question to ask here: “What kind of civic education?” In this study, the term civic education is defined “as educating children, from early childhood, to become clear-thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2005). In this definition, UNESCO uses the term ‘society’ to refer to a nation or any territory which is recognized as a state. If then the goal of civic education is to produce clear-thinking and enlightened citizens, UNESCO asserts that civic education should have the following three main objectives:

1. educating people in citizenship and human rights through an understanding of the principles and institutions which govern a state or nation,

2. learning to exercise one’s judgment and critical faculty and

3. acquiring a sense of individual and community responsibilities

According to the above definition, therefore, civic education goes beyond educating students to become knowledgeable about the institutions that govern a state. In sum, it is “a means to teach the critical and deliberative skills necessary to participate effectively in contentious public debates” (Westheimer, 2004, p. 231). Therefore, civic education equips citizens with tools to critique policies; it encourages dissent (Westheimer, 2004). Yet,
substantial literature indicates that many countries fall short of teaching this kind of civic education, or overlook its importance altogether. This is well illustrated by Schiwille and Amadeo (2002) who give an account of how civic education is perceived internationally by citing case studies from countries such as Canada, Australia, Bulgaria, England, the Netherlands and Israel. The study illustrates how young people are alienated from and are ignorant of political institutions and practices. The authors perceive alienation from civic education as a problem of curriculum development in most of the cited countries. While in most countries civic education is not taught as a separate subject, in countries where it is taught separately, it is allocated the least time, implying that many countries do not view civic education as a subject that would help students to develop into responsible, active citizens.

In North America, a plethora of literature indicates that civic education is usually a peripheral subject in most schools (Burstein, Hutton, & Curtis, 2006; Callan, 1994; Carr, 2007; Cross, 2004; Lintner, 2006; Meier, 2003; Pass, 2007). For example, an empirical study of elementary teachers in California by Burstein et al. (2006) which examines the state of social studies in the classroom reveals that teachers spent the majority of the time teaching subjects tested on standardized measures and did not have time to develop concepts that promote civic engagement and participation in democracy. Even in cases where civic education is taught, teachers use teacher-centred approaches instead of using student-centred approaches, thereby leaving no spaces for discussions and debates. A teacher-centred approach implies that the teacher is the knower and comes with all the knowledge that students need to have. In such a case, learners’ critical thinking skills do not develop because they become passive and learn to take in what is passed on to them as absolute truth and the
only truth; they “adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them” (Freire, 1993, p. 73). This “banking concept of education” is well illustrated by the empirical findings of a study done in public schools in the USA by Chiodo and Byford (2004) that examine the attitudes of 8th grade students toward the learning of social studies. The findings indicate that the students find it boring because teachers use lecture method instead of using a variety of techniques such as debates, projects or discussions.

In a more critical vein, Sears and Hughes (2006) problematize citizenship education and argue that citizenship education can be used to indoctrinate. Defining education as “the opening of possibilities through the exploration of alternative understandings” (p. 4). Sears and Hughes argue that when education narrows and limits possibilities for students to act, then it becomes indoctrination. The authors cite the US and Canada as sites where indoctrination, rather than citizenship education takes place. The authors, for example, assert that in Canada a good citizen is equated with a good person. This assertion is echoed by Westheimer (2008) who argues that democratic citizens engage in political participation, free speech, civil liberties and social equality, principles that are lacking in most schools in Canada and the US. The author further argues that in Canada, for instance, volunteerism is encouraged while more important issues are pushed aside. Elsewhere, Westheimer and Kahne (2004) argue that civic education in Canada strives to produce what they call “the personally responsible citizen” who unquestioningly makes contributions to whatever cause is presented to them. Such education, the authors argue, only emphasize honesty, integrity, self-discipline and hard work. The authors also argue that civic education in Canada strives to produce “the participatory citizen” who learns how government institutions work and is therefore prepared to plan and participate in organized efforts to care for those in need. Thus,
according to these critics, civic education nurtures compassion by engaging students in volunteer community service. Although these aspects of civic education are important in society, the authors contend that little is done to produce “the social justice-oriented citizen,…individuals who critically assess social, political and economic structures and explore strategies for change that address root causes of problems” (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 29).

Like Canada, the United States’ goals of “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) have left no room for discussion of important issues. The NCLB Act, which was introduced in the United States to increase the standards of accountability, was based on the belief that setting high standards and establishing “measurable” goals could improve individual education outcomes (Hess & Petrilli, 2006). The establishment of this Act has left teachers with no option but to teach to the test. Consequently, important issues such as historical interpretation have been erased from the curriculum (Westheimer, 2008). Callan (1994) decries such a move because it suggests that American civic education should only focus on the history that shows the good side of America. Branding it sentimental civic education, he argues that such an education is moralizing instead of being morally critical.

Studies also indicate that while some teachers may be interested in bringing social change through the teaching of civic education, their perceptions of what good citizenship is are not in line with the kind of civic education that promotes democracy and social justice. This is evident in the comparative case study carried out by Myers (2005). In this study, Myers compares how teachers’ activism in Toronto, Canada and Porto Allegre, Brazil influences their teaching practices. The findings reveal that among Porto Allegre teachers, critical consciousness and political awareness of citizenship were the goals of citizenship
education. However, most teachers in Toronto perceived citizenship as a preparation for living in a multicultural society and failed to explicitly discuss issues of social class, gender and tolerance. Although Toronto teachers may have sound reasons for doing so—whether based on bureaucratic nature of schools or otherwise—it still illustrates that civic education in Canada falls short of preparing students to become agents of social transformation.

In the African context, the scanty literature available indicates that civic education is explicitly used as a tool of social control. In fact, the literature indicates civic education in the African context is not only used as a means of social control, but it also goes hand in hand with blatant authoritarianism. Harber (1990), for instance, explores the role of social studies in African schools in creating citizens who are critically aware of the social realities surrounding them. He points out that Anglophone African countries that include Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia joined the African Social Studies Programs (ASSP) in 1967 to influence the development of social studies in their countries. The nonprofit intergovernmental organization was to promote and monitor curriculum, especially in the area of social studies. At its inception, the members addressed three key issues: what social studies was, what approach should be used to teach social studies and what the objectives of social studies should be. The objectives of teaching social studies were then agreed as follows: The African school child shall be given the opportunity, through social studies education to:

a) discover knowledge with the guidance of the teacher;
b) apply problem-solving techniques to new learning situations;
c) train his mind in building valuable concepts and generalizations for the purpose of understanding the world around him;
d) develop skills that will enable him to solve environmental problems and control and improve his environment effectively;
e) become development conscious. (ASSP, 1985, as cited in Harber, 1990, p. 28)

This meant that students were to be encouraged to take part in building the economies of their young nations since these countries had just gained their independence.

In spite of these objectives, Harber (1990) notes that social studies is far from being liberatory in Africa. This is largely because most African governments inhibit the development of critical social studies that would allow free exploration and examination of social issues that might result in dissent. He gives the example of countries that are led by a military regime who would not tolerate any teaching that would question authority or critique leaders. Thus, while many African countries argue that they promote democratic societies through their educational objectives, they rarely do. A good illustration is the case of Kenya where the social studies syllabus seems to be designed as a tool of social control (Harber, 1990). He notes that social education and ethics which is a compulsory course in secondary schools aimed to instill morals in students. Such a prescriptive course is subjective because morals are culturally specific. The implication here is that someone or a group of people in power define what is moral to suit their own interests and then this is passed on to students as the only legitimate knowledge.

Commenting on ASSP, Asimeng-Boahene (2003) points out that while the intentions of the program were noble, teaching critical social studies in African countries creates tensions and contradictions which leave teachers frustrated. For example, while social studies requires teachers to teach democratic values and promote critical thinking, some cultural influences thwart such efforts. Besides, the political climate is not supportive of these goals and would view independent critical thinking as a threat to national identity. Given that social studies is not accorded the prominence it deserves, many teachers who teach social
studies in Africa are unqualified. Asimeng-Boahene (2003) illustrates this by point by reporting that in Malawi 19% of social studies teachers are unqualified; in Liberia, 71% are unqualified; and in Kenya social studies teachers did not get training, but were given hands-on training by teachers who have taught the subject. The problem is compounded by the scarcity of instructional materials. This scarcity forces teachers to copy notes on the blackboard for the students and answering questions that require simple recall (Rowell & Prophet, 1990). The scholars point out that such classroom interactions fail to recognize beliefs and values students bring with them to the classroom, which limits the expansion of students’ expressive capacities, thereby preventing them from developing to their full potential. This inhibition is worsened by the kind of authoritarianism that exists in schools. According to Harber (2002), the presence of an atmosphere that is repressive, intimidating and intolerant stifles debates—debates that would be in search of creative solutions. This authoritarianism is also reported by Sifuna (2000) who argues that such authoritarianism is a violation of individual freedom and rights. Noting the limitations of schools to promote human rights education, he advocates an overhaul of the authoritarian structure of schools that inculcates fear in students and rewards blind obedience to authority, consequently reducing students to the level of docility.

Furthermore, studies indicate that this authoritarianism is also prevalent in institutions of higher learning. Klopp and Orina (2002), for example, give a detailed account of how the Kenyan government silences university students who play a critical role in building a free and democratic country. Authoritarianism in institutions of higher learning may have trickle-down effects given that teachers trained under such conditions may tend to be authoritarian in their future schools. Thus, most African states ensure the status quo is maintained by
crippling students into docility through the teaching of blind patriotism or through intimidation.

Whether the mechanism employed to maintain the status quo in both contexts (North America and Africa) is explicit or implicit, the end result is that it produces blind patriots. According to Kahne and Middaugh (2006, p. 11), “blind patriots adopt a stance of unquestioning endorsement of their country — denying the value of critique and analysis and generally emphasizing allegiance and symbolic behaviors.” Juxtaposing blind patriotism with constructive patriotism, they argue the latter is democratic because it not only allows citizens to applaud positive actions by the state but is also allows critique that may lead to positive social change. Thus, failing to produce constructive patriots is failing to produce citizens who clamour for socio-political improvement; it is a way of maintaining the status quo.

Civic education as a tool of empowerment.

If civic education is to be a tool of empowerment and the gateway to the establishment of peace in society, it is imperative that both content and the process of passing on the content adhere to the principles of democracy; it is imperative students learn that they can control their own lives. For this to happen, students should be provided with opportunities to develop their critical-thinking skills (Bickmore, 2001; Blacker, 1996; Brock-Utne, 2000; Freire, 1992, 1993; Harber, 1990). For Harber, to achieve peace and democracy, it is important to provide a space where students’ critical awareness can be awakened so that students are aware of the social realities in their world (1990). Echoing Freire, Harber contends that “it is important for learners to see that social reality is not immutable and inevitable, but can be transformed” (1990, p. 27). For him, social studies provides an excellent platform for the discussion of issues that would lead to students’ social awareness
and eventually to social action. Other scholars like Apple (2003, 2004), Applebaum (2004, 2005), Dei (2004), Dovey (1996), Kincheloe (1993, 2005), Nieto (2002), Shor (1993) and Waghid (2007) support his views by arguing that students should be helped to develop a critical lens through which they could better understand structures of oppression based on ethnicity, class, gender and race. By so doing, students develop understanding of themselves and other people, develop mutual respect, tolerance and appreciate differences. Brock-Utne (2000) underscores the need for developing students’ critical consciousness by explaining that students with critical and analytical minds would promote cooperative ways of working together to solve socio-political problems. This would include being able to detect the hidden impact of laws and policies that seem neutral but are only used to marginalize the students (Liebenberg, 1999).

In addition, civic education becomes instrumental in empowering students when schools model what democracy is by including students from diverse backgrounds, sharing authority with students and allowing students to take up leadership initiative (Bickmore, 2001). Engel (2008) supports Bickmore’s view by citing Dewey’s model of democratic education. She argues that democratic education should provide opportunities where students actively engage in the learning process. To do this, teachers have to learn to risk relinquishing their authority—giving students some authority in order for them to learn governing a democratic society. This aspect of learning by doing is discussed further by Ehrlich (1999). Drawing on Dewey’s philosophy, he asserts that meaningful civic education is that which is linked to the community, because schools do not exist in isolation.

Therefore, if civic education is to empower students, learning to listen to different viewpoints should be at the core of democratic education (Bickmore, 2001). In fact, Walter
(1997) underscores the importance of deliberation. Defining deliberation as listening and taking turns to talk, and striving to understand other peoples’ viewpoint, he argues that deliberation should be taught in schools. To him, the school is the first public place where children experience public life and it should, therefore, be the place to learn the art of deliberation given that children come from diverse backgrounds. He argues that deliberation should be fostered through cooperative learning and through deliberating on school policies. Doing this would not only create spaces for students to learn tolerance and conflict management, but it would also create a platform for discussing controversial issues such as pervasive injustice, marginalization, and other forms of oppression.

This literature indicates that civic education that empowers is that which teaches students how to think and not what to think (Wood, 1988); it is the kind of education that questions any form of injustice. Such civic education is not apolitical; it fosters social justice by questioning any form of violence; it is humane. Any civic education short of this robs education of its social meaning. Following this line of argument, my study interrogates whether civic education in Kenya plays the crucial and noble role it is supposed to play. In other words, my study looks into the Kenyan civic education curriculum to better understand what kind of citizens Kenya is producing.

The section that follows presents an overview of the educational context of the study.

**Kenyan Educational Context**

To understand the current educational context in Kenya, it is necessary to look at the development of education from the pre-colonial period up to the present. This includes pre-colonial/indigenous education which was primarily informal, colonial education and post-
colonial education. Also included in this section is teacher education because the training teachers receive influences their pedagogical practices.

**Pre-colonial education (indigenous knowledges).**

Pre-colonial education or indigenous knowledges have been described by Dei, Hall, and Rosenberg (2000) as the common sense ideas and cultural knowledges of local people concerning the everyday realities of living. They encompass the cultural tradition, values, belief systems and worldviews that, in an indigenous society, are imparted to the younger generation by elders. They also refer to the worldview that come from direct experiences of nature and its relationship to the social world. (p. 1)

Like elsewhere in the world, African peoples have always had their own modes of education and despite the linguistic and cultural diversity, their education bears striking resemblance. Broadly speaking, the education given to members of the society prepared them to take certain roles in society and to become useful members of that society (Kenyatta, 1938; Koech, 1977; Omolewa, 2007). Therefore, the main objective of this education was to train youth for adulthood (Kenyatta, 1938; Koech, 1977; Marlow-Ferguson & Lopez, 2001). The education, which was based on practical common sense and experience, was holistic (Kenyatta, 1938; Omolewa, 2007; Marlow- Ferguson & Lopez, 2001). Writing about the Gikuyu (Agikuyu) people of Kenya, Kenyatta (1938) contends that the experiential education was not only practiced by the Gikuyu (and by Africans in general), but it was also practiced by societies in the Western world. Kenyatta writes:

Agikuyu system of education bears a remarkable resemblance to one of the features of modern practice in England and America. I refer to the stress now given to learning through experience of life in a community...By this method, instruction is given, as it were, incidentally...What is most impressive about the Agikuyu method of learning is that thus acquired is related to a practical need. (p. 123)
Most probably, Kenyatta (1938) here is drawing parallels between African indigenous education and the progressive education advocated by John Dewey (1939). Dewey argued that relevant education is that which is linked to the children’s social world and thus emphasized engaging students in real-world practical workshops in which students would acquire knowledge and demonstrate it. Learning by doing or apprenticeship was the method that Africans had always used (Omolewa, 2007).

Apart from skills development, African education emphasized social responsibility, political participation, spirituality and moral values (Kenyatta, 1938; Marlow-Ferguson & Lopez, 2001; Omulewa, 2007). This was passed on from one generation to the next by word of mouth—through song, dance, proverbs, folktales and myths (Elabor-Idemudia, 2000; Kenyatta, 1938; Koech, 1977; Omolewa, 2007). The folktales told to children always had moral lessons. Some of the major themes that ran through many African folktales and proverbs pointed to the importance of showing respect, kindness and communal solidarity. In addition, selfishness, exploitation and maltreatment of the weak were vices that would never be tolerated and therefore through folklore, children learned what was acceptable and what was not acceptable in the society. For example, in African folktales the ogre symbolizes oppressive, evil characters that society would wish to eliminate. Hence, in all the Agikuyu folktales, for example, ogres are eliminated and people and animals are rescued from the ruthlessness of the ogres. Given that folktales carry moral lessons, evil must never be given a chance to triumph. Therefore, through folklore, children were exposed to issues of power and oppression and implicitly, they learned the importance of communal resistance.

Unfortunately, this holistic education was discouraged when missionaries arrived in Kenya and introduced Western education. Given that Africa was viewed as a primitive space,
its peoples’ knowledge, cultures, languages and worldviews were excluded from the new system of education. Consequently, this devaluation of African value systems resulted in cultural estrangement, which in turn served to reinforce Africans’ self-devaluation and self-hatred (Nyamnjoh, 2004).

Despite the cultural invasion from the West, the sense of communal solidarity has not been completely erased. Kenyatta (1938) points out that

in the Gikuyu community there is no individual affair [and] in spite of the foreign elements which work against many of the Gikuyu institutions and the desire to implant the system of wholesale westernization, this system of mutual help and the tribal solidarity in social services, political and economic activities are still maintained by the large majority of the Gikuyu people. (p. 120)

Although the above statement was made seventy years ago, it still holds true for many ethnic groups in Africa today. Nevertheless, the ethnic solidarity that is practiced today largely emanates from the encounter of indigenous societies with the political economy and culture of the West (Berman, Eyoh, & Kymlicka, 2004). The emergence of new political systems in Africa made it necessary for individuals to seek stronger kinship ties in order to be protected from post-colonial dictators. This being the case, individuals feel compelled to abide by the terms established by kinships or ethnicities (Ekeh, 2004). He compares this need for protection to an “invisible hand of kinship that compels one to participate in kinship affairs—even the well-to-do abide by the implicit contract of the power that kinship holds in Africa” (Ekeh, 2004, p. 35).

Over the years, African indigenous education and cultures have continued to experience significant transformation due to Africa’s encounter with Western education and culture.
**Colonial formal education.**

Formal education was introduced in Kenya in the 1800s by Christian missionaries. The goal of introducing formal education to Africans was purely for the spread of Christianity in Africa (Alwy & Schech, 2004; Mwiria, 1991). The subjects taught to Africans included reading and writing, which were necessary tools for the spread of Christianity. Practical subjects such as carpentry and agriculture were also taught (Alwy & Schech, 2004; Mwiria, 1991). According to Alwy and Schech (2004), by 1910, missionaries had established 35 schools unaided by the British government, who showed no interest in educating Africans until much later.

The British government’s decision to educate the Africans was solely to serve the interests of the British government. The colonial education was designed to produce workers who would remain submissive and serve in subordinate positions and at the same time play the role of “civilizing” their fellow natives (Mwiria, 1991). To this end, the colonial government designed an education that was inferior to the education provided to Europeans and Asians. For example, a European’s pupil annual education expenditure was 56 pounds; for an Asian pupil was 8.3 pounds; and for an African pupil was 1 pound (Mwiria, 1991). In addition, schools for the Africans were few, teachers were unqualified and instructional materials were scarce. Education was therefore used as a mechanism which would keep the African at the bottom of the social ladder.

To ensure that few Africans advanced academically, African parents were forced to pay school fees that they could hardly afford, to supplement the minimum funding given by the colonial government. Furthermore, examinations were used as part of the restrictive mechanism to deny Africans formal education (Mwiria, 1991). Mwiria (1991) also notes that
the curriculum that strictly emphasized technical and agricultural subjects was similar to the one designed for Africans in the United States. In Kenya, for the few who managed to get admission to high school, they were bombarded with Western cultural values through the teaching of European literature and history. Christian religion which was an integral part of the curriculum denounced African customs as heathen (Mwiria, 1991; Sicherman, 1995; Whitehead, 2005). In her article, “Ngugi’s Colonial Education: the Subversion of the African Mind,” Sicherman (1995) highlights the “systematic and calculated brainwashing” of Africans. To portray the dehumanizing effects of the cultural violence experienced by Africans, the author uses phrases like “soul mutilation,” “disembodied spirits,” “emotional deprivation” and “psychic murder.” These phrases point to several effects: one, students were alienated from their own communities; hence, their cultural identities slowly waned. Second, through constant exposure to Western culture, students were made to be ashamed of their own cultures (Sicherman, 1995, p. 25). Third, students developed self-devaluation (Nyamnjo, 2004).

Despite the cultural violence inherent in this type of education, many Africans who only received practice-oriented education viewed academic-oriented education as a means through which their social standing would be elevated. They wanted the high quality of education that Europeans and Asians received, but at the same time they wanted an education that would not destroy their cultures. This led to the rejection of the education offered by the British government and Africans started their own independent schools (Mwiria, 1991; Omolewa, 2007; Whitehead, 2005). At the time of independence, there was already a distinguished group of educated elite and it was this group that took over power from the colonial government (Mwiria, 1991). Unfortunately, when this group came to power, they
did little to change the ugly scene left behind by the imperial government. The mental subversion remained indelibly imprinted on the elite, thereby making them oppressors of their own people.

**Post-colonial education.**

After years of British domination and racial discrimination, Africans sought to introduce a new system of education that would be grounded on equal opportunity and social justice (Eshiwani, 1993). This led to the establishment of Kenya Education Commission (KEC) in 1964 whose main objective was to ensure that educational policies reflected the needs and interests of Kenyans (Eshiwani, 1993). Thus, at independence, “the government recognized education as a basic human right and a powerful tool for human resource and national development” (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), 2005, p. 3).

Since independence, there have been successive committees formed to address educational issues. For instance, in 1976 a committee was formed to redefine Kenya’s educational policies and objectives. The report produced by this committee emphasized the need to strengthen national unity and to promote economic, social and cultural aspirations of the people of Kenya (MOEST, 2005). These objectives were echoed in a report written in 2000 by a commission of inquiry, which had been mandated to inquire into the Kenyan education system and make recommendations on how the Kenyan education system can promote national unity, social responsibility, rapid industrial and technological development, life-long learning and adaptation in response to changing circumstances (MOEST, p. 3). Although there were many other education committees, the 1981 committee is very
important in the education history of Kenya because it led to the abolition of “A” levels” and the establishment of 8-4-4 system of education (MOEST, 2005).

Education in Kenya follows the 8-4-4 system of education. Primary education runs for 8 years, secondary and higher education run for 4 years each. The first 8 years of schooling are compulsory (Marlow-Ferguson & Lopez, 2001). According to Marlow-Ferguson and Lopez, 5,544,998 pupils were enrolled in primary schools and 619,839 were enrolled in secondary schools in 2001. She further notes that student-teacher ratio was 30:1 in primary schools 15:1 in secondary schools. However, these ratios have changed since the introduction of free education in 2003 (UNESCO, 2006). According to UNESCO reports, enrollment in primary schools went up from 5.9 million to 7.6 million and with only 19,819 primary schools some primary schools have up to 100 students in a class (Nzomo, 2003). Given that there are only 4,250 secondary schools, admission to one of these secondary schools is determined by one’s performance on Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), an examination which is written in the final year of primary education. Students’ performance also determines what kind of secondary school they will be admitted to. Since the medium of instruction is English from Standard 4 (the equivalent of Grade 4 in Canadian system of education), the examinations are written in English.

Kenyan secondary schools are of two categories: public and private. Public schools are further divided into two categories. As Marlow-Ferguson and Lopez (2001) point out, there are government schools that are relatively well equipped, and most of which are boarding schools either for boys or girls. There are also “harambee” schools or self-help public schools that are often ill-equipped because of lack of funding. Most of these are day schools. However, the location of the self-help school may also determine how well/poorly
equipped and well-staffed it is. The private schools, the majority of which are day schools, are either owned by organizations such as religious groups or individuals. The fees of these schools are hefty and only children from wealthy backgrounds attend. Irrespective of what secondary school a student goes to, at the end of the fourth year, students whose aim is to enroll in one of the Kenyan universities or colleges write the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), which is a gateway to higher education for those who perform well. In this study, I focus on two Nairobi self-help mixed schools that are relatively well equipped and staffed.

**Teacher education.**

Currently teacher education programs train teachers for pre-primary, primary, secondary, special and vocational and technical education. Teacher education is expected to develop teachers’ communication skills, professional attitudes and values. It is also expected to equip teachers with the knowledge and ability to identify and develop the educational needs of learners (MOEST, 2005). These expectations are stipulated as follows:

- **Pre-primary teacher education:** Curriculum for pre-primary teacher education entails training in experimental learning methods that allow trainees to direct the learning process. In theory, the curriculum trains teachers to cater to the total development of the child’s personality. In practice, however, teachers are put under pressure to provide the child with the academic head start needed for primary school learning. Only 44% of all pre-primary teachers are trained.

- **Primary teacher education:** Primary teachers are trained to teach all subjects offered in the primary curriculum. However, the content of the entire curricula is too wide to cover while at the same time acquiring the requisite pedagogical
skills. There is the need for primary Teacher Education curriculum to encompass emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS education, drug and substance abuse, among others. The curriculum for this level should also place more emphasis on child-centred approaches in teaching so as not to transmit forms of teaching in which pupils are passive and expected to recall facts when required to. This approach needs to be changed through regular curriculum review and in-servicing.

- Secondary Teacher Education: Most of the teachers are trained at public universities and diploma colleges and are required to specialize in two teaching subjects upon graduation. Currently, the class sizes in universities are too large for lecturers to pay special attention to methodology and therefore the quality of the teacher is often compromised. In addition, a lot of students take education courses for the lack of alternatives. There is the need to restructure the program to enable the trainees acquire sufficient subject mastery and pedagogy. Universities will thus be required to extend the current Bachelor of Education programs to 5 years or have those aspiring to be teachers complete their first degree then take a post-graduate diploma in education. It is also important to note that there has not been a continuous skills upgrading because of lack of adequate opportunities for in-service training. Practicing teachers do not get opportunities for enhancing their skills beyond those required in pre-service education (MOEST, 2005, pp. 73-74).

**Conclusion**

This chapter is a review of the literature that discusses several issues pertaining to the teaching of civic education. The chapter illuminates how critical constructivism principles can be employed in a classroom in a way that could foster democratic practices. Other issues
highlighted in the literature point to the need to create spaces that enhance peace in schools due to the violence that exists in the world. The literature reviews that although schools are expected to promote peace, schools are one of the many institutions that perpetuate violence. The literature also reveals that structural violence, as well as direct violence, is a common phenomenon in many schools, both in developing and developed countries. At the same time, the literature indicates that through the teaching of civic education, schools can be instruments of peace and democracy, which can be promoted by empowering students by allowing them to discuss societal issues with the aim of challenging injustices. This would involve teaching critical citizenship education that would delve into the discussion of controversial issues. Such an education would be different from the kind of citizenship education that is reported in the literature.

According to the literature, most schools in many countries do not give civic education the importance it deserves and when it is taught, it is aimed at moulding students to become “good citizens” who would conform and follow orders without questioning. However, there is also literature that suggests that schools are moving towards teaching critical citizenship albeit slowly. The literature emphasizes that if citizens are to be active in shaping their own destinies and making the society a more peaceful place, schools should rethink the teaching of civic education and adopt a more critical way of doing so.

Having presented the literature that informs this study, I now turn to the research design and the methodology employed in the study.
Chapter Three:
Research Design and Methodology

To gain insight into Kenyan students’ experiences in civic education classrooms, I have used a qualitative research approach. According to Merriam (2002), using such an approach allows one to learn “how individuals experience and interact with their social world and the meaning it has for them” (p. 4). The approach lends itself to the interpretive understanding of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, using this approach has allowed me to investigate how students and teachers construct and interpret their socio-political reality (Merriam, 2002). Thus, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) note, the field of qualitative research is also political; this implies, then, that a researcher can combine both critical point of view and a humanistic perspective in the same project. In my study, the humanistic perspective has helped me gain deeper understanding of the students’ lived experiences while the critical point of view has been essential in helping me to examine how power relations play out in classroom practices.

Ethnography

Given the wide range of qualitative research approaches, I have adopted an ethnographic approach to conduct my research. Pole and Morrison (2003) define ethnography as “an approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit the location” (p. 16). This first-hand experience is captured through observation, interviews and document analysis (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003).
Modern ethnographic approaches to research draw on the social research established in the 1920s and 1930s by the Chicago school of sociology and anthropology (Gérin-Lajoie, 2003; Merriam, 2002; Pole & Morrison, 2003). According to Pole and Morrison, ethnography appeals to many social scientists because “it lends itself to a study of the structures and interactions which shape many locations, communities and social groups” (p. 13). This makes the ethnographic approach appropriate for studying educational contexts. Indeed, Delamont and Atkinson (1995) have defined ethnography in educational settings as “research on and in educational institutions based on participant observation and/or permanent recordings of everyday life in naturally occurring settings” (p. 15).

Ethnographic educational research, which has its theoretical basis in social interaction studies (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2002), interprets classroom interactions and all teaching and learning situations and gives voice to those who do not have a voice in everyday school processes. This is well articulated by Gubrium and Holstein (2003) who note that to interview individuals on a societal level can contribute to democratization because it gives participants a voice. Ethnography gives precedence to an insider’s perspective of his or her social world (Pole & Morrison, 2003) thereby making participants to become a source of knowledge. Thus, although I have used a “traditional” ethnographic approach to my research, I hoped to unearth underlying messages; therefore, I have taken a critical point of view to study social practices and power relations.

The fact that ethnography lends itself to a study of the structures and interactions which shape social groups has made it appropriate for my study. For one, it provides me with an opportunity to immerse myself in the social world (Esterberg, 2002) of the students in order to gain more insight into the students’ lived experiences in the classroom. A look from
within therefore helped me to capture students’ lived experiences. From this vantage point, I also examined how teachers of civic education define knowledge in terms of civic education and why and how students interact with the given knowledge. This approach to my study was necessary to examine the way the Kenyan civic education curriculum and teaching practices foster, or do not foster, peace and democracy.

**Data Collection Techniques**

This study utilized the three techniques used frequently in ethnographic studies: document analysis, observations and interviews.

*Document analysis.*

Documents are an important source of data because they already exist in the setting under study and cannot, in any way, be influenced by the presence of the researcher (Merriam, 2002). Given that documents are written to serve some purpose in a particular setting, they can give one clues or valuable data about the topic under study. In my study, I examined curriculum documents such as the syllabus to understand the content and the goals of civic education in Kenya and to find out what issues are emphasized and try to look for clues why this is so. In addition, student textbooks and examinations were analyzed to determine whether the content and the goals of civic education enumerated in the curriculum documents were reflected in the textbooks.

*Observations.*

This technique provides the researcher with first-hand experience (Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 1990). This being the case, it “makes it possible to record behaviour as it is happening” (Merriam, 1990, p. 88). Observations not only afford one an opportunity to
develop a deeper understanding of the context under study, but they also allow the researcher to collect data even when participants are uncomfortable to discuss the topic under study (Merriam, 1990, 2002).

Observations are grouped in four typologies (Merriam, 1990) which are described as follows: (a) complete participant: this is where the researcher is a member of the group being observed, but his/her role as a researcher is kept secret. In this case, the researcher does not take any notes. This type of observation can raise ethical issues given that participants consent is not sought (Merriam, 1990; Pole & Morrison, 2003); (b) participant-as-observer: in this case, the researcher is or becomes a member of the community he or she is observing. Although the researcher plays the roles of a participant and observer simultaneously, his/her role as a participant is more salient than that of an observer. Participating actively in the setting allows the researcher to witness first hand and in details the events in which he or she is interested (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Although observation in this case is not covert, the researcher cannot take notes as the activity is going on; (c) observer-as-participant: the researcher’s activities as an observer are well known to the group being observed. Although he or she may participate in the group’s activities, his/her participation is kept minimal to allow him/her to gather information; (d) complete observer: like complete participant, the researcher’s activity as an observer is kept secret. In this case, the researcher may observe a group from a hidden place or from a place where he or she goes unnoticed by the group being observed. As already mentioned, this may pose ethical issues since the researcher gathers information without the subjects’ consent.

In this study, I assumed the role of observer-as-participant; consequently, all the participants, including the students, were aware that I was going to gather information on
classroom interactions. For the most part, I concentrated on taking field notes as the teachers lectured. Given that the majority of the lesson time was spent on teacher lectures and question-and-answer sessions, the observations and note-taking went on uninterrupted. I was also able to record “thick descriptions” from student presentations as well as from other interactions observed outside the classrooms. During the first few class observations, I was conscious that the teachers were a little uncomfortable about my presence, and the students paid noticeable attention to my presence. However, they soon got used to having an outsider in their classrooms (see p. 77 for details).

**Interviews.**

Interviewing is essential in ethnography because it allows the researcher to get closer to the participant’s perspective (Gubrium & Holstein, 2003). Through interviews, one can learn “about people’s interior experiences, what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions” (p. 27).

Interviews are of different categories that range from highly structured to unstructured. According to Merriam (2002), structured interviews have predetermined specific questions, asked in the order that is also predetermined. Unlike structured interviews, unstructured interviews have topic areas to explore but the questions and the order in which they are asked is not predetermined. This not only allows the interviewer a greater scope in asking questions, but it also allows the interviewees a greater opportunity to answer questions and ask questions than in structured interviews (Pole & Morrison, 2003). Between this continuum of highly structured and unstructured interviews lies the semi-structured interviews. Merriam (2002) and Pole and Morrison (2003) define semi-structured interviews as a mix of structured and unstructured interviews. Semi-structured interviews allow the
interviewer the “flexibility of introducing “probes” for expanding, developing and clarifying informants’ responses” (Pole & Morrison, 2003, p. 30) or adding new themes as the interview progresses. At the same time, they allow the interviewees to talk about their views and experiences in depth.

In my study, I used semi-structured and unstructured interviews. I carried out semi-structured interviews with individual school principals, teachers, groups of students and an official from one of the government education agencies. As well, I carried out unstructured interviews with students and teachers while doing observations. Pole and Morrison (2003) explain that unstructured interviews quickly merge into conversations which constitute an important source of data. Given that such conversations are not guided by a rigid set of questions, rapport may be quickly established in which case the interviewer and the participants explore the topic suggested by the interviewer or any topic introduced by the participant that may be relevant to the study. Such discussions can generate an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences and beliefs (Morgan, 1998). However, given the multiple possible ‘influences’ on the interaction and the trajectory of the interview (Rapley, 2004), one cannot rely solely on interviews. Therefore, interviews were used to complement document analysis and observations.

**The Study**

This research involved a critical analysis of the practices of civic education in Kenya and the examination of how Kenyan civic education curriculum deals with questions of social difference as a way of promoting peace and democracy in society. In particular, the study focused on Form 1 (equivalent of Canadian Grade 9) civic education curriculum.
In order to study the civic education curriculum, I spent time in two high schools in Kenya and observed civic education lessons. Participants in the study were recruited from the two schools in Nairobi. The context was also purposively selected given that it addressed a specific purpose related to my research question (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The research question sought to look into issues pertaining to social difference and Nairobi schools stood out as an excellent choice because they offer the kind of ethnic diversity that I wanted to investigate (rural settings are more or less ethnically homogenous). Additionally, the urban setting explicitly represents different social classes, a characteristic that is subtle in rural settings.

The body of participants comprised the principals of the two schools; 48 Form 1 students who were selected to participate in group interviews from four Form 1 classes comprising 184 students; four civic education teachers teaching the four classes; and one official from a government education agency involved in developing civic education/social studies curriculum. The views of these stakeholders are quoted extensively to reveal their perceptions and opinions about the goals of history and government school curriculum.

**Profile of participants.**

The four teachers, whose ages ranged between 35 and 45, were all female. All had a teaching experience of more than 10 years and they all had professional training. The curriculum developer was a man in his early 40s and had worked in this capacity for a government education agency for several years. However, at the time of the interview he had been a history and government course curriculum developer for one year.

The principal of Kapana High School was in her mid-40s. She had been a teacher for 22 years. At the time of the interview she had held her administrative position for 7 years, as
a deputy principal and later as a principal. The principal of Lango High School was a woman in her late 40s or early 50s. She had a teaching experience of about 25 years. Prior to becoming the principal of Lango High School, she had been a deputy principal of a big school for many years. At the time of the interview, she had worked as a principal for one year.\footnote{To keep the anonymity of the participants, their names as well as the names of the schools have been changed. The curriculum developer is identified by title, so are the two principals. However, to make the distinction between the two principals clear, they are identified by their schools; thus, the principal of Kapana High School is identified as “Kapana principal” and the principal of Lango High School is identified as “Lango principal.” Students and teachers are identified by pseudonyms. Kapana High School teachers are identified as Syombua and Hekima and Lango High School teachers are identified as Aminata and Katungwa.}

Out of the 48 students who participated in the group interviews, 24 were girls. The students came from 7 ethnic groups which represented all the ethnic groups in the 4 classes of both schools. Their ages ranged between 14 and 17. The age gap results from several factors: one, students might not have started school at the recommended age. Two, poor performance at lower levels might have forced them to repeat classes at the elementary level, and three, before the introduction of free education students often dropped out of school due to lack of school fees only to go back much later when fees were available.

All the participants shared valuable information from which emerged the following themes and ideas: relevance of history and government (read civic education); discussing controversial social issues; student voice; classroom learning activities and pedagogical challenges.

During the interviews, it was observed that participants referred to the course as history, not as history and government. As was explained by the curriculum developer, history and government was previously history and civics. He further explained that the term history and government was adopted in the newer syllabus but it also covered civic...
education. Therefore the terms history, history and government, civic education and social studies are used interchangeably in this study.

As already noted, data were collected from document analysis, observations and interviews. First, curriculum documents, examinations and student textbooks were analyzed to examine whether issues that promote peace and democracy such as respectful acknowledgement of social difference are included in the curriculum content. Observations were then carried out in civic education classes. Each civic education class was visited at least twice a week between the months of June and October, 2009. The observations of the four classes in the two schools were run concurrently rather than observing two classes in one school for a certain period and then moving on to the next school. Observing the classes concurrently gave me a better opportunity to compare everyday happenings in the two settings. Form 1 students were purposively selected for the study because these students had just graduated from Standard 8 (the equivalent of Grade 8 in Canadian education system). For these students, Form 1 is usually a transitional period and therefore this provides an excellent bridge between the civic education taught in elementary school as part of social studies and the civic education taught as part of history and government in high school.

To document students and teachers’ views on classroom interactions, I conducted one in-depth individual semi-structured interview which lasted between 30 to 60 minutes each with the principals, teachers and one history and government curriculum developer. I also held 8 semi-structured group interviews with the students from each school. Each group had six students, 3 female and 3 male. All interviews, which were conducted in English (see p. 75: option to use Kiswahili was offered but was not taken up), were audio-taped. In addition, informal conversations with participants while observing also served as an important source
of data; therefore, these conversations were recorded. The data was then processed as follows: along with the field-notes, audio-taped data from interviews were transcribed verbatim and read to find out if there were gaps that needed to be clarified. Thereafter, all the data collected were coded accordingly. Coded data was then synthesized and the emergent themes and patterns were identified in order to complete the analysis.

**Issues with Data Collection**

In my study, I took the role of observer-as-participant. This role allowed me to become a human instrument where I had the opportunity to understand the complexity of human interactions encountered in even the shortest of observations (Merriam, 1990, p. 103). However, as I entered the field, I realized that I had personal biases that needed to be addressed. Being Kenyan and having been raised and educated in Kenya, the sites that I visited brought back memories of authoritarianism and canings that I had experienced. This made it difficult for me to sever my past experiences, which had become part of my beliefs, from what was going on in the world of the students I was observing. This notwithstanding, as a researcher, I needed to interpret the social setting as objectively as possible. This was possible because I had the capacity to keep my beliefs in check.

Also, the fact that I had taught in Kenya made me question the extent to which my insider status would influence my data collection. Merriam (1990) points out that these biases are inherent in all investigations, so to address my personal biases, I utilized my outsider status that was informed by critical constructivism and critical pedagogy as a way of keeping my biases in check. Thus, on the one hand, as an insider I allowed myself the opportunity to look at issues from within, using the cultural lens of my participants. On the other hand, I observed the world of my participants as an outsider using a critical lens. The data from these
observations enriched the data that I gathered from documents, informal conversations and interviews.

Regarding interviews, one of the issues that were of concern was the use of English as the language of communication with the students. Although English is the medium of instruction and Kenya’s official language, I was concerned that students may not be in a position to express their opinions as they would like to due to inadequate English proficiency skills. I was not at first sure whether telling students to use Kiswahili if they wanted to would be welcome by the administration. However, this concern was cleared once I learned the students were allowed to use either English or Kiswahili in the school. During all the interviews, I informed participants they could use Kiswahili if they so wished. I also told them I would explain interview questions in Kiswahili if they did not understand the English version. Interestingly, students insisted on the use of English and even when I suggested to one of the students who was clearly struggling to explain himself in English to use Kiswahili, he said he did not want to use Kiswahili. Only a negligible number of students put in a few Kiswahili words. Because I wanted to respect their decision and at the same time I did not want to compromise my data collection, I decided to give participants as much time as they needed to express their opinions. I also repeated their opinions to confirm that I had not misinterpreted their meaning.

Another concern that arose as I conducted my first interview with one of the teachers was the use of terminologies. I realized there were terminologies that teachers in this context were not familiar with or the terms used had a different interpretation. For example, the four teachers were not familiar with the phrase “teaching philosophy” and once I realized this, I followed the question with an explanation of what I meant or rephrased the question. Also, to
avoid misinterpretation of educators’ meanings, I often repeated what they said for verification and sometimes clarification.

**Gaining Access**

To gain access to the site, I first had to get permission from the board of ethics at OISE, University of Toronto. With this permission, I then wrote a letter to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Kenya. Prior to this, I had contacted the principals of the schools I wished to visit by telephone. They had expressed that they would not have any objection provided I had written official permission from the Ministry of Education. On arriving in Kenya, I went to the Ministry of Education where I was granted written permission to carry out the research. I took copies of the letter to the principals who allowed me to start my research whenever I wanted. They also granted me permission to attend school assemblies and meetings.

Although it was easy to gain entry to the schools, I still felt I needed to talk to the class teachers I was going to observe and interview to seek their formal approval. I was a bit apprehensive about their reaction because I was not sure if they would trust me enough to want me to observe their classes, especially if I told them I was studying in Canada. I knew as an investigator, I needed to demonstrate that I was worthy, as a researcher and human being, of being accorded the cooperation to carry out my investigations (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Therefore, to gain the teachers’ trust, I explained to them that I had taught in Kenya for many years and shared my teaching experiences both in Kenya and Canada. In addition, I sat in the staff-room with teachers and ate the food the school provided. Refusing to eat with the teachers would have been perceived as rather rude. Also, in my conversations, I constantly switched from English to Kiswahili and vice versa. This is the “normal” way of
speaking in Kenya. Despite the fact that I was studying in the West, sharing my teaching experience and using code-switching established that we had a lot in common. Taylor and Bogdan (1984) suggest that pointing out commonalities between the researcher and participants helps in establishing rapport and this did work for me; I quickly established rapport with the teaching staff.

I found it necessary also to gain students’ confidence and trust. I knew that they would be curious about my presence in their classes, so I explained to them why I was there. At first, it was obvious students noticed my presence, but as time passed I became “invisible” (Esterberg, 2002) to both the students and the teachers.

Thus, between the months of June and October, 2009, I spent time in the two schools observing history and government lessons, interviewing participants and analyzing curriculum documents using critical constructivism as my theoretical framework with the aim of finding out whether the current curriculum promotes peace and democracy in Kenya. This study involved observing teaching practices in civic education classes and analyzing their link to democracy. The knowledge attained from this investigation led to a better understanding of students’ experiences in the classrooms and how these experiences prepared them to become active/inactive, responsible/irresponsible citizens.

The chapter that follows will describe and analyze the content of the official documents pertaining to the history and government course.
Chapter Four:
The Official Discourse of Civic Education in Kenya

Introduction

In chapter 2, I mapped out the historical development of education in Kenya. I mentioned that after independence, Kenyan leaders introduced a system of education that would offer equal opportunity to all and promote social justice. It was in the same spirit that Kenya joined ASSP in 1967 (see pp. 49-50) to ensure that the social studies that students were exposed to was liberatory. Kenyan leaders did not only want reforms that would move the country from colonial education, but also wanted to create more egalitarian and democratic institutions that would also foster economic development. This is clearly spelt out in the social studies curriculum guide that describes the role of social studies as that of restoring a sense of superiority and pride in Kenyan’s customs, values and self-confidence and developing the skills and attitudes needed in facing new challenges in economic and political life (KIE, 1969, p. 17). The challenges in the political life here refer to the challenges of promoting nationalism and patriotism among so many ethnic groups.

Forty years later, the official discourse in the teaching of social studies (history and government), for the most part, has remained unchanged. Like many other African countries, Kenya is still working hard to promote nationalism and patriotism among its people through history and government. Thus, in Kenya, the history and government course functions as a tool for the formation of a national identity/cohesion and for the advancement of the nation’s economy.

The history and government policy documents mandate that the subject be taught as a separate subject, three times a week for 40 minutes in Form I and 2. The curriculum
emphasizes the acquisition of values and attitudes that facilitate a harmonious social life and peaceful living in a democracy. Besides the curriculum documents, teachers rely heavily on student textbooks because they do not have teacher guide-books. These student history and government textbooks have been recommended by KIE. At the end of each chapter there are questions to check students’ comprehension. There are also suggested activities in the textbooks that students could do. These activities span from holding class debates to visiting places such as national museums and the parliament. To ensure that they taught according to the prescribed curriculum, teachers used the *Secondary School Education Syllabus* (Kenya Literature bureau, 2003), which has all the topics and subtopics to be covered. The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) also provides schools with all the topics that students are expected to cover in preparation for the national examinations done at the end of the fourth year of secondary school.

**Curricular Content**

To gain insight into the meanings embedded in curriculum documents, I employed a method of analysis used by Clausen, Horton, and Lemisko (2008) which treats documents not as authority but as evidence. For me, this meant paying close attention to the latent content to unearth any underlying meanings or evidence from the documents. To do this, I cross-examined statements using questions that were hitherto formulated to address the objectives of the study. I also narrowed down the analysis and focused on the manifest content by selecting keywords that were directly related to my study such as peace, social justice, democracy, citizenship, patriotism, equality, ethnicity, government and national integration. This technique was also employed by Clausen et al. (2008). Selecting these keywords was necessary because it would enable me to analyze only those areas of the
official documents related to my study. Although my focus was particularly on the Form 1 curriculum, I also briefly examined Form 2 to 4 curricula to identify any linkages between Form 1 content and the content in the upper level curricula. I also examined two recommended student textbooks: *The Evolving World: Form One Students’ Book* authored by Kapiyo, Kiruthu and Muma (1996) and *History and Government: Form One Students’ Book* written by Kenya Literature Bureau (2003). To get insight into what kind of thinking skills the course developed, I examined end-of-term, end-of-year and national examinations. Other documents on general education policies were also examined to glean any information on the history and government course. One such document is the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) policy framework for education which states the Kenya philosophy of education as follows:

The development, management, organization, and delivery of education and training services will be guided by the philosophy of “education and Training for Social Cohesion as well as Human Economic Development.” The focus of various sub-sectors of education will be on the acquisition of life-skills and life-long learning. Emphasis will be on the provision of holistic quality education and training that promotes education that involves both cognitive and affective domains. Instilling values such as patriotism, equality, peace, security, honesty, humility, love, respect, tolerance, cooperation and democracy through education and training will be critical. Quality and relevant education and training for Kenya must also address emerging challenges such as respect for human rights, drug and substance abuse, corruption, violence and social exclusion. For these reasons, education for the 21st century will have to depart significantly from the past trends by addressing global issues such as environmental concerns, technology and terrorism. For equity, it will be necessary to take affirmative action to compensate for historical and emerging inequalities and disparities in all areas of our national life including gender. Ultimately, there is need to offer Kenyans education and training that promotes sustainable development, peace and social justice. (2005, p. 25)

Given that my study was to investigate how the history and government course promotes peace, democracy and social justice in Kenya (as clearly expressed in the
MOEST’s policy document) I then sought to find out how well history and government curriculum was informed by this philosophy. However, as I did this, I was fully aware that teachers’ interpretations of the curriculum were informed by their set of values and beliefs; consequently, what the official curriculum reflects could be different from the enacted curriculum.

In the introduction of history and government curriculum, the subject is described as an important discipline because it plays a key role in the development of society. The document states that “it is through the study of the subject (history and government) that the youth of a nation acquire knowledge about the past and the present so as to develop positive attitudes about the future” (KIE, 2002, p. 3). It is therefore hoped that through history and government, “the learner will develop into a socially and economically useful member of the society” (p: 3). Thus, from this introduction, it is clear that the subject is expected to promote economic development, which is an integral part of the education philosophy. What is not clear, however, is what “positive attitude” means or includes.

The notions of peace, democracy and social justice are explicitly articulated in some of the history and government objectives, and where these notions are not articulated, a teacher can easily incorporate them. Although the curriculum outlines nine objectives, I have paid close attention to the six that are directly related to my study.

One of the objectives of studying history and government states: “by the end of the course, learners should be able to acquire knowledge, ability and show appreciation for critical historical analysis of socio-economic and political organization of African societies” (KIE, 2002, p. 4). This objective has the potential to move students from discussing what happened in the 18th century to critically discussing socio-economic/political issues that
create structural violence in present-day Kenya. However, the curriculum expectations are that “by the end of the topic, the learner should be able to discuss the Social, Economic and Political organization of the Bantu, the Nilotes and the Cushites” (KIE, 2002, p. 6). The suggested activity in the student textbook is to discuss social, economic and political organization of the groups given in the curriculum. It was in fact observed that at the end-of-term history and government examination at Kapana High School, students had the above activity as one of their examination questions. Other questions related to this objective were (a) state five reasons for the migration of the Bantu from their original homeland into Kenya; (b) name three communities that form the western Bantu; (c) state two ways in which communities interacted during the pre-colonial period and (d) give five functions of Laibon/Oloiboni of the Maasai during the pre-colonial period. The use of the term “discuss” may suggest that students were not supposed to recall facts. Nevertheless, the teachers’ end-of-term marking scheme clearly indicated that “discuss” meant listing the social, political and economic aspects of various ethnic groups. Therefore, the questions focused more on recall and did not require any critical analysis of the socio-economic and political organization of African societies. As a result, they fell short of encouraging independent thinking and developing problem-solving skills that are needed to tackle socio-economic and political challenges in Kenya today.

To help students develop critical thinking and interpersonal skills, a more eclectic approach that would use verbs like identify, name, analyze, explain, construct, formulate questions, state, discuss, debate, assess, and the like would be more effective. To illustrate, if students were asked to analyze a text, that would mean examining the text in detail to discover meaning. Consequently, students would not just be receiving information from the
teacher or from a textbook, but they would be deconstructing a text to come up with their own meaning; they would be exercising their thinking faculties. In other words, they would be learning how to think. If one of the goals of history and government is to assist learners to develop into “socially useful” members of the Kenyan society, then the development of learners’ critical consciousness should not be overlooked. Socially useful citizens should also be politically active.

Although the teacher may try to make the topic more relevant by bringing in current socio-economic and political issues into the lesson, the fact that there is no explicit link between the past and the present robs the topic of its most relevant element: “the critical analysis of socio-economic and political organization of the African societies.” Bringing in relevant issues into the lesson would assist students to understand the current socio-economic and political situation they are currently embedded in. Consequently, students may begin to “see” social injustices and learn to deal with them in class discussions instead of bottling up bitterness that might erupt once they are out of the school gates. Learning becomes purposeful when issues such as ethnicity, classicism, nepotism, disability and gender are incorporated into the lessons. These are issues that are firmly connected to students’ current real world experiences and as such, these issues would make learning much more effective and meaningful.

It is important to mention here that socio-economic and political developments and challenges experienced since independence are in the Form 4 curriculum. However, given that history and government is not a mandatory subject in Form 3 and 4, only those students who choose to take the subject get the opportunity to learn more about the present-day socio-
economic issues. Therefore, failing to make the past/present connection in the Form 1 curriculum may make the subject lose its relevance, at least in the eyes of the students.

Another observation made is that the “African societies” that students are expected to discuss are the majority groups listed as Agikuyu, Ameru, Akamba, Abagusii, Abaluhya, Mijikenda, Luo, Nandi, Maasai, Borana and Somali. The minority groups have not been mentioned either in the curriculum documents or in the Form 1 student textbooks. This partisan nature of education is not only reflected in the history and government curriculum; it is also reflected in lower primary school curriculum. For example, a Standard 2 (Grade 2) Kiswahili course book (Zani & Zani, 1993, p. 4) has a reading section with names such as Njeri, Karanja, Njuguna and Njugu, all from the Agikuyu group, which is the dominant group in Kenya. Names from the other 41 groups have not been included. This, however, is not an isolated case. In fact, Berman et al. (2004, p. 16) remind us that

it would be naïve to suppose that dominant groups will not always be tempted to use their control to promote their identities and practices…the fact is that the state cannot avoid implicitly or explicitly supporting some cultures over others.

The literature indicates that in pluralistic contexts, whether in developing or developed nations, minority groups are often marginalized (see Anyon, 1995, 2005; Apple, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2004; Banks, 2001, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2007; H. Giroux, 1992; Kozol, 1991; McLaren, 1989, 1995; Nieto, 2002; Sleeter, 1996). Whether this is intended or otherwise, the exclusion of the minority groups illustrates how the role of education, especially in courses that deal with the promotion of peace and social justice, can be paradoxical. The fact that one of the subject’s objectives is to help students appreciate the rich and varied cultures of the Kenyan people makes it quite ironic.
Promotion of justice and peace, which is intimately related to my study, is clearly articulated in the official documents as follows: “by the end of the course, the learner should be able to understand and show appreciation of the rights, privileges and obligations of oneself and others for the promotion of a just and peaceful society” (KIE, 2002, p. 4). This is one of the objectives that explicitly mention justice and peace. Although the curriculum documents do not define the notions of justice and peace, it is clear from the documents that good knowledge of one’s rights, privileges and obligations is expected to promote peace and justice. To this end, students are expected to state ways of becoming a Kenyan citizen, as well as the rights and responsibilities of a citizen. They are also expected to discuss the elements of good citizenship.

One of the two student textbooks introduces the chapter on citizenship by defining citizenship as “a legal right of a person to belong to a particular country” (Kapiyo, Kiruthu, & Muma, 1996, p. 113). Although the second textbook has a similar definition, it has the adage that “he gives his (sic) loyalty to his country first. He enjoys all the rights that citizens of the country are entitled to” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 83). Thus, the nature of citizenship seems reciprocal; one has to meet certain conditions that are embedded in what the textbooks record as “responsibilities of a citizen” and “the elements of a good citizenship” in order to “legally belong.”

After the definition, the textbooks provide a list of the rights and freedoms of a citizen and the restrictions to these rights. Some of these rights are (a) freedom of conscience: this is explained as the freedom to believe or think what one desires. Consequently, no one should be forced into an opinion or belief; (b) freedom from discrimination that may be based on colour, ethnicity, gender, religion or age; (c) freedom of expression; (d) right to property and
(e) freedom from torture—torture is explained as any inhuman treatment, physical, mental or psychological. One of the three restrictions that follow immediately after the list of rights is that “rights should not work against national interests” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 84). Seemingly, from these textbooks, rights and freedoms provide citizens a potentially “democratic space” within which to operate. However, the responsibilities and what is perceived as elements of good citizenship seem to have a certain mould in which every “good” citizen should fit.

According to one of the textbooks, the responsibilities of a citizen include respecting the law, safeguarding the law, having valid documentation, paying taxes, voting and participating in public debates and other issues of common interest (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 86). Given that the curriculum expectations stipulate that by the end of the course students should appreciate their responsibilities, this section of citizenship education seems to lean towards developing passive, obedient citizens. The only responsibility that seems to lean towards democratic citizenship is participation in public debates. However, this is not explained further, so the nature of public debates does not suggest if dissent or opposition is part of these debates. Democratic education allows the development of critical thinking and deliberation skills necessary to participate effectively in contentious public debates (Westheimer, 2004). This raises questions of whether the history and government curriculum promotes a sense of awareness for a functional democracy of the Kenyan people and other nations, which is one of the objectives outlined.

Likewise, the elements of good citizenship seem to lean towards the creation of passive citizens, citizens with good character. One of the elements is that one should be a patriot and a nationalist. The textbook explains that a patriot loves, serves, and seeks to
promote the well-being of his or her country. A patriot, therefore, is a nationalist (another element of good citizenship) because he or she is devoted to Kenya and seeks to unite fellow countrymen (sic) above interests of race, tribe, religion or parochialism” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 87). This list of social difference does not include gender, social class and disability. In my view, it is important to make salient all forms of social difference that may foster disunity. It is also glaringly evident that great importance is attached to the promotion of patriotism and national cohesion. In fact, this is not only an element of good citizenship, but it is also one of the history and government objectives in the curriculum documents.

Morality is another element of good citizenship that has been accorded significant emphasis. Like promotion of patriotism and nationalism, this aspect is also an objective in the curriculum documents. It reads: “by the end of the course, learners should be able to encourage and sustain moral and mutual social responsibility” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 87). The Ministry’s policy document explains that education and training integrates social responsibility, including nurturing cultural heritage, spiritual values, combating drug and substance abuse, fostering sensitivity to the spread of human calamities such as HIV/AIDS, developing positive attitude to work, promoting gender equity and caring for the vulnerable regions and groups. It is interesting to note that policy documents emphasize gender equity here when the very documents and textbooks use gendered language. As regards moral and ethical values, the document clearly specifies the moral values that history and government should inculcate: peace, integrity, hard work, honesty and equity (MOEST, 2005, p. 26). Although the textbooks do not explain specifically what these moral values are, they do mention that moral values include universally accepted moral standards such as the respect for life, honesty and decency.
Closely related to this is integrity. One of the textbooks explains that a person who has integrity is a good citizen and “does what the law expects at all times and in all situations. This includes being dutiful, faithful and efficient without seeking any further inducement apart from one’s salary or wage” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 87). Notably, the need to abide by the law at all times and in all situations is emphasized. In my view, this aspect of good citizenship seems to cripple any activism or dissent. For instance, “all situations” could be interpreted to mean that even if laws are oppressive and contradict the human rights charter, one should still obey those laws. Questioning that which seems unjust in the eyes of a citizen may be deemed breaking the law. Freire (2005) reminds us that education should empower students to challenge injustices. Unfortunately, phrases such as being dutiful, faithful and law-abiding at all times may lead one to surmise that silencing citizens and promoting blind obedience are means through which “negative peace” might be attained, without necessarily working towards the attainment of “positive peace” (see pp. 3, 4 for further details). Citizenship education should strive to go beyond teaching students to conform; it should include maximal forms of citizenship education that promote values, attitudes and behaviours related to active participation in a democracy and citizenship at all levels (Dejaeghere & Tudball, 2007).

Ethics is another aspect of good citizenship that has been emphasized. One of the textbooks explains that “these are rules and regulations that govern behaviour such as accountability, transparency, zero tolerance to corruption, hard work and personal initiative” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 87). This aspect of a good citizen seems to create a citizen whose major role is to promote the nation economically, which is a good thing. Nevertheless, it is a little disappointing not to find such aspects of good citizenship as
speaking to injustices and other social ills. So far, what this topic seems to promote is
careracter education not the kind of citizenship education that would lead to social change.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) and Westheimer (2008) point out that citizenship education in
a democratic society requires more than just acts of kindness and decency. They argue that
citizenship education prepares students to become one of the three: “the personally
responsible citizen,” “the participatory citizen” or “the social-justice oriented citizen.”

Drawing on Westheimer’s description of the kinds of citizens schools mould, my view is that
history and government has, for the most part, succeeded in creating “the personally
responsible citizen” who obediently responds to: “don’t do drugs; show up to work on time;
give blood; help others during flood; recycle, etc.” (Westheimer, 2008, p. 10). While
Westheimer acknowledges the importance of the above traits, he cautions that these are not
about democratic citizenship for indeed, traits that lean towards obedience and loyalty may
impede independent thought that democracy requires.

As already mentioned, promotion of social cohesion is one of the objectives of the
course. To achieve this objective, an entire chapter has been devoted to the topic. This is no
surprise because the MOEST’s purpose of education is to promote social cohesion and
human economic development. The ministry’s policy document further notes:

Education and training inculcates patriotism and nationalism without
compromising responsibility on global issues. To achieve this objective the
Ministry will ensure that the Kenyan linguistic heritage serves these
values…mother tongues, the national language, Kiswahili and English, the
official language will continue to play their respective roles in education.
However, special emphasis will be given to the role of the national language
as a tool of national unity …striving for the national common good forms an
integral and critical component of the education and training system. To
achieve national integration and cohesion, our institutions must be the media
for the promotion of the values of mutual respect and tolerance. (MOEST,
2005, p. 26)
Related to this topic are specific objectives: students should be able to explain the meaning and importance of national integration; to describe factors promoting and limiting national unity and the process of resolving conflicts (KIE, 2002, p. 7). In the student textbook, *History and Government: Form One Students’ Book*, national integration is defined as “the process or means of bringing into one people of diverse cultures, religion, race, tribe, occupation and social background that live in one country” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 89). Diversity here does not include gender and disability as markers of social difference. Omission of gender and disability only works against the goal of teaching about unity and national cohesion. The textbook points out that from 1886 to 1963, the British colonial government used force to bring ethnic groups together. The textbook also points out that since independence the government has made attempts to fuse the different peoples of Kenya into one nation. Juxtaposing the two governments seems to be well calculated to highlight the malevolent nature of the British government and the benevolent nature of the Kenyan government that does not force people to come together, but “makes attempts to fuse different peoples.” This is not to down play the evils of the British colonial government, but to call attention to how language can be used to win the sympathy of citizens and therefore to serve the interest of the “producers” of that “knowledge” whose goal is to maintain the status quo.

The next subtopic is the importance of national integration. The textbook explains that national integration is a condition for lasting peace and prosperity; that lack of unity leads to stunted economic growth and sufferings of innocent people. The importance of national unity is restated by noting that without it, there would be no political stability or a feeling of security, which are conditions conducive to tourists (Kenya Literature Bureau,
2003, p. 90). It seems that the term “peace” here refers to only direct violence because the explanation given in the textbook is that people will not tend their crops for fear of being attacked. Also, the suffering of the innocent, according to the textbook, refers to those who might be caught up in the crossfire. Feelings of insecurity that may deter tourists from visiting the country point to acts of direct violence. While it is important to discuss issues that may keep direct violence at bay, I also believe that failing to discuss the more subtle acts of violence makes it difficult to move towards justice and peace. The official discourse pertaining to national integration seems to use fear as a tool of national cohesion. Suffering is juxtaposed with “lasting peace,” and however utopian this may sound, it is a discourse that convinces people of the need to work towards national integration. In addition, the discourse obscures the need to discuss structural violence that might, indeed, be the root cause of direct violence. The discourse fails to acknowledge that innocent people always find themselves in the crossfire of social injustice; that innocent people die every day due to structural violence. Hoivik (1977) reminds us that structural violence is as dangerous as direct violence. Thus, while the curriculum’s objective is to promote “peace,” it falls short of doing so because it ignores the most important social ills that should be at the core of history and government lessons.

The next section in the textbook outlines factors that promote national unity. The Kenyan constitution is given as the first factor because it is expected to protect Kenyans from discrimination on the grounds of race, place of origin, community or creed. Again, gender, disability and social class are not included. Failing to name the victims of discrimination is tantamount to failing to teach issues that foster democracy, peace and social justice. Although the textbook notes that the constitution “guarantees equality of opportunity for all
citizens” (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003, p. 90), lack of representation of all social groups sends a contradictory message. In Kenya there is a significant rift between the rich and the poor, so social class should not be overlooked. In addition, issues regarding direct and indirect violence on women are a common occurrence in Kenya (Chege, 2006; Kubow, 2007) and these ought to be challenged. People living with disabilities have been relegated to the margins for decades. Therefore, to say that the constitution guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens yet these groups are excluded from school curricula sounds like sheer rhetoric.

Socialization of children is given as another factor that promotes unity. Children, the textbook notes, are encouraged from an early age to think of themselves as Kenyans. This socialization is augmented by learning of the national symbols which are the national flag, the national anthem, the loyalty pledge and national awards. With respect to the national flag, learners are expected to know what each colour symbolizes; they should be able to explain that black represents the people of Kenya; red represents the bloodshed in the fight for independence; green represents the fertility of the land and white represents peace. The coat of arms, which is in the middle of the flag, has a warrior’s shield which represents Kenya's pride and tradition. Apart from learning the symbolism of the colours of the flag, the topic does not allow students to critically examine the implications of the term “independence” and “peace” in the Kenyan context. In addition, learners are expected to learn the lyrics of the national anthem. The lyrics carry a rich and noble message:

O God of all creation  
Bless this our land and nation  
Justice be our shield and defender  
May we dwell in unity  
Peace and liberty  
Plenty be found within our borders.
Let one and all arise  
With hearts both strong and true  
Service be our earnest endeavour  
And our homeland of Kenya  
Heritage of splendour  
Firm may we stand to defend.

Let all with one accord  
In common bond united  
Build this our nation together  
And the glory of Kenya  
The fruit of our labour  
Fill every heart with thanksgiving.

Like the colours of the flag, there is no evidence in the official curriculum and the textbooks that the lyrics of the national anthem, which reflect ideals of a democratic state, are critically analyzed by students. The first stanza, for instance, talks about justice being the citizens’ shield and defender. Allowing students to discuss and analyze the lyrics would elicit a healthy and empowering discussion on whether or not Kenya strives to promote justice and peace. As already mentioned, it should not be assumed that the enacted curriculum reflects the official curriculum. Teachers who are social-justice oriented may actually use the national anthem lyrics to trigger a dialogue on social justice, and as Bigelow (1994) points out, teachers should always make use of every opportunity to introduce a legacy of resistance to injustice, for this helps nurture an ethos of hope and possibility.

The Loyalty Pledge is yet another symbol that is expected to foster national unity; consequently, students are expected to memorize it. Citizens pledge to play their part in nation building and to uphold love, peace and unity. The last symbol is national awards. The textbook explains that these awards are given to those Kenyans who have contributed to the country. It seems that the underlying message here is that the nation rewards “good citizens.” One wonders whether critiquing the government and fighting social injustices would be
viewed as contributing positively to the country, considering that promoting a sense of awareness and need for a functional democracy of the people and other nations is one of the objectives in the curriculum documents.

Factors that may be a barrier to national integration are also clearly outlined. They include: religious conflicts, ethnicity, racism and intolerance of difference, corruption, divisive politics, and economic inequality. Indeed, these factors contribute to violence—direct and indirect—and if issues pertaining to these factors are openly discussed in the classroom, it would give students opportunities to discuss issues that would foster peace and democracy. But the language used in the student textbook seems to downplay some factors. For instance, while economic inequality is viewed as one of the factors that may contribute to disunity, the book explains that this inequality was an inheritance from the colonial period. The book further explains that unemployment, unequal income distribution, lack of land, the wide gap between the rich and the poor, and adverse climate conditions are the major causes of poverty. Are students then supposed to blame the British colonial government solely for this? Is there a possibility that those who wish to maintain the status quo are implicated? The fact that the blame is shifted to the colonial rulers seems to silence any discussion on socio-economic inequalities that are seemingly perpetuated by those maintaining the present status quo.

Also silenced are discussions on religious differences. The textbook explains that religious conflicts are common and gives examples of conflicts between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland and Christians versus Muslims in Sudan. However, the textbook points out that in Kenya, there are no difficulties in respecting other people’s religious beliefs, an indication that this was an issue that did not need to be addressed.
As already mentioned, at the end of each chapter of the student textbooks, there are activities and review questions. Unlike other chapters, this chapter on national integration/unity has activities that require students to interact and use high level thinking skills. For example, students are asked to:

- hold a class debate on the topic “the youth are important in national integration,”
- imagine a conflict between workers and their employer, explain its origins and impact on the development of the country and how to resolve the conflict and
- suggest conditions that may necessitate using the military or police in conflict resolution.

In my view, these are good activities because they are open-ended and move away from rote memorization. However, given that one of the specific objectives of this chapter is to have learners describe factors that promote and limit national integration, a more relevant debate topic would have been, for example, to ask students to hold a debate on whether national integration is a goal that can be achieved in Kenya. Such a debate would allow students to think of reasons that impede or foster national integration. In addition, more questions regarding conflict management would give students the opportunity to generate ideas. For instance, instead of focusing on conflicts between workers and their employer, which takes students away from political debates, in my view, a more effective question would focus on conflicts of a larger scale such as ethnic conflicts, especially because ethnicity is listed as one of the factors that inhibit national integration and peace. Such a question would help students confront controversial issues that are directly related to the political climate in Kenya today. As Bickmore (2008) notes, “conflict should be discussed explicitly in relation to democratic
politics, to encourage student engagement…this develops skills, awareness, relationships and inclination to participate in democracy” (p. 446). Following Bickmore’s line of thought, asking students to suggest conditions that may necessitate using the military or police in conflict resolution raises one question: would such an activity encourage them to engage in looking for resolutions or would it encourage them to view suppression as a quick means through which “peace” could be restored?

**Conclusion**

The evidence gathered indicates that the official documents spell out the ideals of a democratic country. It is evident from the content that the history and government curriculum is expected to promote peace and democracy in general. However, the content seems to promote “negative peace”—the kind of peace that would lead to the absence of war or direct violence. The two textbooks are not critical of the social inequalities; thus, issues that may threaten peace such as social difference are not given the emphasis they deserve. In addition, the content seems to emphasize rights-oriented discourses of democracy and the promotion of citizens who blindly obey. Nevertheless, as already mentioned, the interpretation of the curriculum depends on individual teachers. As a result, teachers may decide to emphasize what they believe is important, even if it is not emphasized in the curriculum. As well, they may deemphasize what they deem unimportant even if it is emphasized in the curriculum. For justice-oriented teachers, the curriculum provides an excellent channel through which issues that have the potential for promoting peace and democracy can be explicitly discussed.
Chapter Five:
Making Sense of the Curriculum

Introduction

In chapter four, I presented the official curriculum of secondary school history and government course and the factors that shaped it. Special attention was paid to the objectives that pointed, either explicitly or implicitly, to the promotion of peace, democracy and social justice. This chapter illuminates stakeholders’ views regarding the history and government curriculum.

On the list of the stakeholders are the teachers, students and to some extent, the school administrators. When the official curriculum is prepared, it is the teachers’ duty to ensure that the curriculum message is conveyed to the students, prevailing school, classroom and other circumstances notwithstanding. On the other hand, administrators oversee the general running of the school and control the general climate of the school both of which make part of the hidden curriculum. Given that school climate includes aspects such as teaching and learning, relationships, environment and safety (Cohen, 2006), some of these aspects contribute, positively or negatively, to the hidden curriculum in the sense that they socialize students to fit into various social classes, though this may not have been the intended outcomes (Apple, 1999) on the part of the administrators. Also, through heads of departments, administrators monitor what areas of the syllabus have been covered by subject teachers and what areas have not been covered. To some degree, this monitoring influences how teachers enact the curriculum. As for the curriculum developers, they are concerned with what is to be taught and for how long (although often times bureaucrats and politicians
have an upper hand). Therefore, these stakeholders, including students for whom the history and government curriculum is prepared, have their own perceptions in relation to the subject.

In this chapter, therefore, the above participants share their perceptions regarding the history and government course. These views are extensively quoted to illuminate how the participants make sense of the curriculum.

**Relevance of the History and Government Course**

Several questions in the interviews probed participants about their views on history and government. This elicited multiple views in regard to the importance of teaching/learning history and government.

*Promotion of social cohesion, patriotism and good citizenship.*

One of the questions directed to the curriculum developer was to explain the importance of the goals of history and government. He explained that history was important because it fostered social cohesion, patriotism and moulded good citizens. To him, the notion of patriotism included “that love and concern for one’s country.” He further explained the difference between good citizenship and patriotism as follows:

I think good citizenship…they are almost very related, but then if you are talking about good citizenship I think we are mainly thinking of um the…the…almost the dos and don’ts in terms of um within the country. You know…you are keeping…you are obeying laws, and doing really what you are supposed to do. But when it comes to patriotism I think it goes beyond that. There is that very, very strong feeling of love and a sense of belonging to the country.
Owing to the fact that most teachers followed the “teachings” in the textbook, History and Government: Form One Students’ Book (Kenya Literature Bureau, 2003) and Secondary School Education Syllabus (Kenya Institute of Education, 2002), out of the four teachers interviewed, three painted a similar portrait of the kind of good citizen they would like to produce through the teaching of history. For instance, Teacher Hekima and Teacher Aminata explained that a good citizen is one who is proud of his or her nation, one who is patriotic and as such obeys the laws of the land. Teacher Aminata further explained how she promoted the ideals of a good citizen in her history and government class:

What I do is I teach them what it entails to be a good citizen, so that they can create that picture in their mind; for example the paying of taxes, they should not evade paying taxes. A good citizen is one who has to carry out his responsibilities very well. So I try to create a picture in them as they are growing up when they grow up, this is what is expected from them. However, there are areas where the law has to be followed by everybody. So as they grow up they know other responsibilities will come up.

According to Teacher Aminata, she was so passionate about teaching history because she believed history would make students good citizens and consequently change the Kenyan society:

Okay, actually I love history. It is in my blood and I want to teach my students that they are the ones who should make the society become a better place, so they need that information. That is why I love the subject; that is why I want to teach these young ones how to prepare themselves and serve the community. I want to see the lives of these young ones change. I want to make them think critically what they should do as grown-ups; that when you grow up you need to serve your community. Apart from passing exam, my essence is to make these students, prepare them so that they can become
mature people in the way they reason, the way they relate to one another and to make them responsible.

To achieve this goal, Teacher Aminata explained that she provided students with information. For example, when teaching a topic such as nationalism, she explains to the students “where there is no peace, there is no society.” She emphasizes what it means to have unity and enumerates the negative effects of disunity. To her, this information, coupled with relevant examples, helped students to become better citizens.

Teacher Aminata also believed that helping students to develop a sense of responsibility and interpersonal skills was central to fostering peace. Thus, for her, one cannot divorce good citizenship from social cohesion and/or peace. This is illustrated in the excerpt that follows:

If you want to create good citizens, it is not just about passing exams. It should be about being able to pass good values to our students so that they can see themselves as Kenyans. They see themselves as people who can interact with their neighbouring communities. They see themselves as people who can even protect the environment. There are many things we discuss in history…I think history should be at the top because it deals with our daily lives and to make a good citizen is better than to have a doctor who is careless [irresponsible]. I believe history should be number one. There is a lot we learn from history. Learning how to stay [live] with somebody is better than being a doctor and being a careless [irresponsible] person.

She further elaborated how history and government “dealt with our daily lives,” how socio-economic issues are part of our daily experiences and how she incorporated these issues in history and government lessons.
You see history as a subject shows us what it is to be united. And for you to be united, you need to have facts which can make you to have that feeling that we need unity. So they need that information—why are people fighting along tribal lines? It is because they have not been educated a lot about what it means to be united and what it means to work as a nation. So they don’t know, so they can be educated—even people in the rural areas—to know that we depend on one another. So if there is civic education in that area, things will be okay. History carries all aspects of our lives: political aspect, economic and social aspect. For example, let me start with social. When you say you have to tolerate another person’s religion, we don’t have to condemn another person’s religion. You have to learn to appreciate other people’s religions. And when you talk about political which is a very key area, you find what is means to be a good leader, what it means to serve your country. So you instil in the students what it means to be patriotic. A patriotic citizen will not fight. A patriotic person will not view other people as if they don’t belong to his community. He sees himself as a Kenyan and all people are Kenyans. And the economic aspect teaches us that for you to get what you don’t have; you have to live in peace with other people. You can sell your produce to other people and also they can buy from you.

Teacher Aminata’s interpretation of including socio-economic and political issues in a history class seems to emphasize the need to develop “good citizens” who “will not fight” but will be obedient. Her interpretation of democratic practices seems to gravitate more towards citizens’ responsibilities and less towards citizens’ rights. Also, Teacher Aminata’s view that history addresses economic issues in the sense that students learn “you can sell your produce to other people and they can buy from you” seems to indicate that socio-economic issues are superficially addressed in the classroom, which suggests that socio-economic inequalities and other injustices are left unchallenged.
Teacher Katungwa, who had earlier brought to my attention that she only became a teacher because of her good grades in history, explained that she would define who a good citizen is just as it is defined in the textbook:

Okay, that is in the second last topic in the Form 1 syllabus. So we teach according to what has been written in the syllabus, in the textbook by the author, but generally a good citizen is someone who abides by the law; it is somebody who pays taxes, one who obeys the authority.

Although the principal of Kapana High School did not define who a good citizen was, her discussion about the importance of history and government clearly indicated she shared the views of the above participants. According to her, history helps to shape students’ character and it is therefore expected to produce good, responsible, law-abiding citizens who would not be engaged in any kind of violence. Reflecting on the post-election violence of 2007, she contended that the importance of teaching history had not been taken seriously because if “history was taught well,” the violence that took place would not have happened. To her, this kind of violence was evidence that the history that was taught fell short of preparing students to become responsible because if it did, citizens would not use violence to express their grievances.

Out there after they [students] finish, they would be able to make a decision and therefore they would not take a stone to throw, [meaning they would not vandalize property or become violent], because they already understand the government well. Instead they would put the challenge of voicing their grievance so that it can reach may be the…whatever, the legislature, those people that make Kenyan laws.
Kapana principal’s argument here pointed to the fact that history can indeed make students responsible and discourage them from engaging in violence, which is a major threat to national cohesion. Her view is shared by Teacher Katungwa who noted that discussing the consequences of disunity might lead to national integration. Thus, to Teacher Katungwa, history fostered national integration because it socializes learners from a “tender age” to identify themselves as people of one nation. She explained:

At least it [history] contributes towards national integration. The young learners will understand that they belong to one nation. They get that information at that tender age. The topic, the content is about the importance of integration, why we need to be together as a nation, and also the effects—what happens when people are not together [united]. So they are told the consequences of not being integrated.

If Teacher Katungwa’s strategy of promoting social cohesion is to “tell” students the consequences of disunity, small wonder that the direct recipients of the curriculum, the students, echoed the views of the above stakeholders regarding the key role history plays in promoting social cohesion, patriotism and good citizenship. Although only a few students’ views are quoted below, an overwhelming majority from both schools shared these view:

**Isaac:** I like history because I need to know… my responsibilities as a Kenyan citizen…some of the duties, when you see someone doing something wrong you must report him or her. So if I see something wrong and there is no one let’s say a thief is breaking into a house, you cannot just sit there and look. You can report. Yeah. You tell the others you see that one is stealing, yeah.

**Linda:** In history and government I like the topic about national integration because it teaches us about how we can solve the conflicts in our country as in
the post elections, the laws we can take to court those who led the post-
election violence. No one is above the law.

**Maria:** I get to know the meaning of conflict and how to resolve conflict so
that we can know what to do when we find people quarrelling. You can know
what steps to take during negotiation.

This prompted me to ask the students what role they played (bearing in mind what
happened during the post-election violence) as good citizens who had the duty to ensure there
was peace and national cohesion. One student, Isaac, responded by saying, “we help those
people who were displaced by donating food; clothes that you feel you don’t need, yeah.”
This view was shared by the majority of the participants.

The kind of citizen portrayed here is “the personally responsible citizen” described by
Westheimer and Kahne (2004) who contribute to causes such as feeding the hungry. Such
citizens do not critically assess socio-political issues. Consequently, instead of trying to
address the root cause of problems, they deal with the results of the problems. Such acts,
although noble, may not lead to social transformation.

Other students felt it was very important to know Kenyan laws because it would help
them to do what the law required of them and to remain patriotic:

**Rubina:** There are basic things which are in government that you learn… I
have an example. We learn like importance of government, we learn how laws
are made and enforced; we learn the importance of patriotism…We practice to
come together and do something together in unity.

**Beth:** We learn patriotism is one way of showing love to your country. That is
why most citizens we love our country…I mean showing love to our country
is by following the rules. We follow the rules in our constitution and
respecting our leaders. We should not insult our leaders for example when we see our president talking on the screen we shouldn’t say look at that person he has made people really suffer [laughter].

Beth raised an interesting point here. To her, one of the important lessons history teaches is to be a patriot, one who does not critique the government. From her last statement one can infer that whether the government acts responsibly or irresponsibly, a patriotic person should not critique the government, but portray steadfast love for his or her country. Another student, Damaris, added the element of obedience as one of the important things learnt. She expressed the importance of being socialized into law-abiding citizens as follows:

History teaches law, it is supposed to be taught well so that we as young people when we grow up we grow knowing the government wants us to do this and does not want us to do this and we know the laws that govern our country.

In short, to all the above stakeholders, history is supposed to produce good citizens who abide by the law and promote peace by remaining uncritical of and loyal to the government or leaders.

Studies indicate that education in many contexts has been used as a tool of social control, thereby producing uncritical citizenry. Sifuna (2000), for example, claims that students in Kenya have been socialized into docility because they are not supposed to critique any information presented to them. Kahne and Middaugh (2006) argue that citizenship education often produces blind patriots who only endorse and pay allegiance to their countries. Sears and Hughes (2006) call such kind of education indoctrination because it does
not give students opportunities to explore alternatives or to critique whatever knowledge they are given.

Among the participants there were some, their number albeit negligible, whose views were slightly different. For instance, although Teacher Syombua noted that good citizens should be patriotic and they should abide by the law, she also added that they should seek to be elected to public office and participate in public debates. To this teacher, history is not meant to produce passive citizens but citizens who desire to sometimes lead, not always to be led; citizens who yearn to deliberate on public issues, not citizens who are always on the receiving end of decisions made by others. She explained that participating in a democracy included expressing opposing views because one of the bills of rights is the freedom of speech or expression.

Teacher Syombua’s view was embraced by one of the students, Carol, who viewed history as a tool that would prepare students to critique the government in the future. To Carol, history could create change agents. She explained:

We come to know what the government is doing whether it is neglecting us or taking care of us so in future you might become one of the diplomatic persons you come and correct the government where it is wrong and that is really important for our country…it is important because if you won’t be told what is wrong you just continue what you were doing assuming it is right and it is not right. There is someone who is needed to make that change.

In fact, at one point during the group interviews, Carol got a little impatient with participants who viewed good citizens as those who were law-abiding, patriotic and therefore uncritical of the government:
I think both of you have forgotten something. A good citizen will also be on the edge of correcting the government because it is never correct most of the time it is wrong, and so you must champion for other people’s rights...You must inform the government in order to be a good citizen not only by obeying the laws and keeping them because if you obey all the laws and still you find that you have some problems and that problem will not be on your side but on the government’s side… if the government is saying something wrong, you must be on the verge of correcting...yeah, you shouldn’t be scared of anything.

As already stated, findings from these interviews reveal that, to most stakeholders, the history and government course is expected to produce responsible citizens who are law abiding, which is only one element of citizenship education. It is worth noting, too, that critical citizenship, which would produce politically active citizens, is not given prominence here. Citizenship education that promotes “good” citizens who obey the law and do whatever they are asked to do makes it difficult for students to discuss societal issues that foster injustices. This kind of citizenship education nurtures citizens who may not engage in democratic practices because it seeks to promote responsible and participatory citizens, not social justice-oriented citizens (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). The above discussions point to the fact that history does not seem to be creating a citizenry prepared and motivated to address societal problems and to create social change particularly related to injustice (Dejaeghere & Tudball, 2007, p. 48). Ekeh (2004) argues that citizens’ contributions should count because they are major stakeholders, but if this does not happen, democracy is compromised. He writes:

A citizen is a political participant who has a major stake in the political process that governs the state. He or she imagines himself or herself as
belonging to a community of fellow citizens who own the state. Where there is an absence of such citizenry, democracy is imperiled. (p. 36)

Most of the participants in these interviews painted portraits of citizens who would be far removed from the political arena. But lost in these portraits was the portrait of the kind of citizen Ekeh (2004) describes. This portrait was well painted by Carol who viewed critiquing the government and “championing for other people’s rights” as elements of a good citizen. This rare portrait illustrates that there are indeed some students with strong political dispositions that can be nurtured to promote peace and social justice in the future. To promote peace and social justice in Kenya, it would be necessary to teach history that aims at making students conscious of issues pertaining to oppression and justice. Calling this conscientization, “the deepening of the attitude of awareness,” Freire (1993, 1997) contends that it is a fundamental ingredient of the liberation process because it makes the oppressed realize they can take charge of their lives; it awakens the human agency that resides in the oppressed and creates a possibility for the oppressed to intervene. Freire (1997) writes:

The very fact human beings have been equipped to recognize how conditioned…they are by economic structures also makes them capable of intervening in the conditioning reality. Knowing oneself to be conditioned…opens up a way for one’s intervention in the world. (p. 34)

Thus, conscientization goes beyond awareness. It means changing the predetermined future that is invented by structures of domination; it means “reinventing” one’s reality and making the world a better place. If history classes in Kenya are going to move towards the promotion of peace and social justice, political consciousness is critical.

**Rights and freedoms awareness.**

One striking finding from the interviews was the overwhelming number of students who also said they embraced history because it made them aware of their rights. In this
respect, students’ interpretation of democratic practices differed from that of the majority of the educators in the sense that students’ interpretation of democratic practices included citizens’ rights and responsibilities. Interestingly, with the exception of Teacher Hekima, none of the other teachers or administrators raised this point. Teacher Hekima and students’ interpretation concurs with Kubow’s (2007) findings that suggest Kenyan and South African teachers’ views about democratic practices gravitate towards rights and responsibilities.

When asked to give examples of some of the rights and freedoms they were now aware of, most of the students mentioned freedom from torture, and all the examples given pointed to protection from parental abuse. Teacher Hekima’s example was, interestingly, similar. Equality in relation to gender was the other right that students mentioned. This right was emphasized by teachers in Kubow’s (2007) study.

Teacher Hekima: …And we have our kids now fighting for their rights. They know they have a right to education, so if they have able parents who are not taking them to school, they are able to fight for that.

Simon: When we talk of rights, also children have rights. Maybe one of our colleagues maybe his parents are mistreating him or her she or he will get to know the rights of a child.

Elizabeth: Like in the topic of citizenship we are told the rights of girls and boys are the same; no one is better than the other; we should all have education. It is a right of both boys and girls.

Linda: In citizenship [chapter on citizenship] it teaches a lot about our rights like you should not have a difference between boys and girls.

Besides learning about their rights and freedoms, students felt that these rights were observed in their history classes in particular, and in their schools in general. For example, they
perceived equal treatment as wearing the same uniform, having male and female prefects and receiving the same education.

**Jane**: Because we learn the same things and we wear the same uniform, so we are equal.

**Lazarus**: yes…and during the traditional societies, girls could not be taken to school. I don’t know why. But during these days, we know that even women have the capability to lead and they can also have brains like men. They can lead in class; they give competition. We are all equal.

**Rosemary**: When choosing prefects, we choose a head-boy and a head-girl. Girls also belong to clubs and they have the ability to lead the clubs.

When students’ attention was drawn to the gender bias that was in their history textbooks, it did not seem to raise any concerns. As one female student explained:

But man stands for both. In history when that term man is used it both involved men and women because in the stages the man evolved we did not say early man or woman. We just said early man, so it also involved [included] man and woman.

Another interesting point raised was that students were not unaware of the barriers that they might encounter as they fought for their rights. This did not only illuminate the social injustices that students may have to deal with in their social world, but also the fact that students have agency and a quiet resistance that speak indirectly to forms of injustices. This is illustrated in the following excerpt.

**Dorcas**: since we learn history to know our rights, when someone does to you something and you feel he is going against your rights, since you know your rights you um um “lazima” [must] you must fight for your rights. You should
go to court because if the one who is going against my rights is my boss, then you can’t take him farther so you just have to go to court and fight for your rights.

**Isaac:** you can report to your parents then your parents can go to the police then the police will come to check whether what that person in authority has done is wrong or correct, but since Kenya is a very corrupt country, that person in authority can give the police a bribe.

According to Simon, if this happened to him and especially if this matter involved the school principal or a teacher, to show his resistance, he would leave the school. Even when another student informed Simon he would not get his tuition fees back, he still said he would need to demonstrate how discontented he was by forfeiting his tuition fees. Substantial literature on school authoritarianism in African schools tends to depict students as totally powerless (Amutabi, 2002; Sifuna, 2000). However, the findings of this study suggest that students have agency that seems to go unnoticed because their resistance to authoritarianism is implicit.

From these findings several inferences are drawn. First, there is evidence that students do not critically engage in discussing rights in relation to gender. For example, gendered language and the lack of representation of women in the student textbooks did not raise any concerns. In addition, when students view themselves as equal because they receive the “same” education, this demonstrates how the official discourses of “we are all equal and “we are the same” mask gender-related injustices. In each of the four classes, only 1/3 of the students were girls. One might wonder if both boys and girls had a right to education, where were all the girls? Dei (2004) points out that discussion on gender differences and schooling in Africa has not critically interrogated the ways in which gender functions to demarcate
students’ life chances. In Kenya, for instance, girls are assigned house chores most of which are done after school, while boys hardly do such chores (Kubow, 2007). As a result, girls may not have enough time to study at home. To say that boys and girls have equal opportunity with respect to education is rather misleading. The discourse of sameness is contradictory here because even though students wear the same colour of uniform, girls are not allowed to wear pants like boys; it is mandatory for girls to wear skirts. This makes gender, in this respect, a social difference that is accorded differential treatment—differential treatment that has been rendered normal and natural.

Absent from this discussion were other forms of social difference such as difference in relation to ethnicity, religion, age, disability, class and race. To have no participant mention ethnicity as a social difference is surprising considering ethnicity has been a significant cause of violence, structural and direct. Dei (2004) points out that in most African countries, dominant discourses of national unity suppress any issues on social difference.

Noted, also, was the example given regarding freedom from torture. As participants explained where this “freedom” would be applicable, both students’ and the teacher’s response pointed to parents as a potential threat to this freedom. Interestingly, among these participants, no one mentioned government institutions as a possible threat. The student textbook defines torture as any kind of inhuman treatment exercised at home or in public. This raises the question whether discussions regarding freedoms from torture were only confined within the home context, thereby obscuring other forms of torture in public places that could reveal the underbelly of the Kenyan institutions. Power relations that could lead to infringement of such a right do not only exist in homes; they exist in schools, prisons and other public places. For instance, a report by Mwai and Ngirachu (2008) indicates that many
schools go on strike to protest the high-handedness of school administrators and the use of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is brutal and inhuman and when this is meted on students, it infringes on the Children Act of 2001 which calls for the protection of children’s rights. This was the argument raised by a group that was against caning in Kenyan schools (Munyiri & Mwaniki, 2008). In fact, studies show that corporal punishment is pervasive in many African countries and it is an issue that should be addressed. Harber (2002), for example, reports that corporal punishment was common in schools in Nigeria, Botswana and Zimbabwe. A more recent study by Dunne (2007) indicates that canning students still continues in Ghana and Botswana.

**Promoting cultures.**

A considerable number of participants expressed they valued history because it teaches people how to appreciate their cultures and other communities’ cultures. For some students, people’s cultures are an important source of knowledge that can help people live better:

**Okello:** For me… we can know our culture…yes our traditions are very important because if we choose our traditions and we choose them very well, we can lead a better life in future.

**Alan:** …history helps understand your culture and respect it so that you will not be found doing bad things that your culture does not like.

**Lydia:** Myself I would like to say that history helps us to maintain our culture. In the past when the people may be for example Luhyas, when the children were still young, they taught the children what they should do and what they should not do.
Robert: I enjoy the topic on the people of Kenya up to the 19th century because it talks about different tribes so you come to know more about other tribes and languages what they underwent and you know more about your tribe and you have more respect for other cultures.

Teacher Syombua: The history syllabus also teaches about the social, economic and the political organization of different communities. One of the objectives of studying history and government is to understand other people’s cultures and appreciate them. So we are teaching our students to appreciate their own communities. Again live as Kenyans; know how to live harmoniously with each other.

Teacher Syombua’s input summarized the views expressed by the student participants. The underlying theme is that appreciation of cultures may lead to tolerance and ultimately to peace and harmony in society. However, the history and government course seems to be playing a contradictory role because not all ethnic groups (cultures) are represented in the history and government curriculum, especially in relation to recent history. This contradiction was observed during the interview with the curriculum developer. As he explained what cultural history was, he mentioned that the syllabus traced the origin of particular Kenyan societies, and pointed out that “…actually it is supposed to trace the origin of all Kenyan societies.” If some groups’ cultures are relegated to the margins, this may foster resentment towards the dominant groups that are usually kept in the limelight and may only help in undermining the peace and harmony which the course is expected to foster.

This kind of marginalization is not uncommon in many parts of the world (Asante, 2005; Battiste, 2000; Dei, 2004; Kerr & Mapanje, 2000). Kerr and Mapanje (2000), for example, note that languages of minority groups in Malawi were banned in schools during President Kamuzu Banda’s reign, which would be termed linguistic violence. Unfortunately,
the exclusion of minority groups and the unequal representation does not help students to respect difference. On the contrary, it reinforces and normalizes differential treatment of ethnic and racial groups.

**Fostering leadership skills.**

A number of student participants expressed their interest in becoming future leaders, which to me, is an indication that they desire to be politically active as adults. Indeed Avery (2007), Hahn (1998) and Torney-Purta (2004) point out that students’ interest in political knowledge is a strong predictor of their future political participation. The students’ interest was expressed as follows:

**Rubina:** As for me I like history because it is a career subject for example for those who would like to be a leader in future is really good because there are some basic things that you need to know when you are a leader. I would even say that in future when some of us shall be leaders, we shall know what policies to follow.

**Mike:** What I like about history and government is that it teaches us what the people of the past used to do and it will help so that I will be able to look at leadership. People in history and government who have been leaders so it will help me and others also to get inspiration so that we can become leaders…We see Haile Selassie and when I hear about Nyerere and many other people in the government how they have ruled and succeeded and they have made changes in Africa. Also I like about Jomo Kenyatta…I would like to become a leader.

For these students to become effective leaders in future, knowledge about past leaders was of paramount importance. This was expressed by Lango principal in the excerpt that follows:
I think our children should be taught history…they need to study about other world leaders, what has made them to excel, what good things you can copy from them… I mean even the past leaders because we must know where we are coming from. We must know where we are now and where we are going. So we also need to look at the past and also look at the mistakes we have done in the past and how they can be corrected today. And then we can have a better country tomorrow. Apart from that, there are also other world leaders. You know I did history myself and even today as I do administration work, I think about leaders like Napoleon. You know I have read so much about Napoleon Bonaparte. There is something good to pick from Napoleon, of course he had his own weaknesses. But there are some strong points you would pick from a leader like that… everybody knew Napoleon but towards the last years he messed up. People like Bismarck…You do history until you want to be a leader like that one…You get even the confidence to talk as a leader.

Lango principal explained that teachers in the school used the weaknesses and strengths of present-day leaders to discuss current-day situations. She explained:

And when they teach about the weaknesses of these leaders…, even Kenyan leaders…akina (for example) Nabongo of Wanga, you know they are in history. And when we talked about what they did and some of the mistakes they did, you know students were able to appreciate, this one was a mistake.

Undoubtedly, leaders are a source of inspiration for and influence on potential leaders. As noted by Lango principal, students can learn leadership skills by being exposed to the mistakes and strengths of leaders. Although Lango principal did not hesitate to talk about the weaknesses of past leaders such as Napoleon or Nabongo of Wanga, from the above excerpt it seemed she avoided talking about the weaknesses and strengths of current leaders. A dearth of literature reports that governments in many African countries are repressive
(Altbach, 2005; Amutabi, 2002; Kerr & Mapanje, 2000), and this makes it difficult for both educators and students to have meaningful dialogues. Seemingly, expressing views that may expose the weaknesses of those in power may not be a very wise thing to do and it might be necessary to censor what one says. This masking of government’s weaknesses and emphasizing its “good side” was a concern for Mike who noted:

I think in history and government, we should learn also what the government should not be doing. For example we should not only learn about the good side of government. I think it is also important to know the bad things that the government is doing.

Mike, like Carol (see p. 107), has a critical mind. He was critical of the official curriculum that did not seem to paint a realistic picture of what goes on in the real world. What Mike seems to be unaware of is the fact that teachers and students are not the only stakeholders and that there are other invisible forces that may make it difficult for teachers to discuss such issues. But as Callan (1994) and Osborne (2000) point out, history that shows only the good side of the country/government is “moralizing instead of being morally critical” because it ignores important issues that promote democracy and social justice.

Discussing Controversial Social Issues

In most societies, issues pertaining to race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, gender etc. often times lead to heated debates and people may try to avoid them. Many scholars, among them, Avery (2007), Bickmore (2008), Fine (1993) and Hahn (1998) argue that if democracy and social justice are to be promoted, these issues should be explicitly discussed in schools. In Kenya, for example, issues surrounding ethnicity are rather sensitive owing to ethnic clashes that usually erupt during and immediately after general
elections. Therefore, to gain insight into how controversial issues are incorporated into history lessons in an effort to promote peace and justice, I asked questions related to ethnic clashes of 2007/2008. This drew mixed responses. Teachers’ views have been extensively quoted to show these conflicting responses.

Teacher Katungwa’s view was that controversial issues were to be kept at bay in history classes. To her, teaching national cohesion included avoiding talking about ethnic groups.

You see ethnicity initially was not an issue at all, especially during our time in school, it wasn’t. That is why I am telling you the trend of things today is what is bringing all this. Initially it was silent. We learned not to be conscious of ethnicity, so in fact today we are teaching them that if we belong to one nation we don’t bring in ethnicity at all. So you don’t tell them although you belong to this and that ethnic group. You tell them you are all Kenyans. Just tell them, to show them we are together, these are some of the things the government is doing; we have things like hospitals, things like schools, we have one constitution, so we belong to one another. So we try our level best not to mention ethnicity, though we know it is there. Yes, we try our best. Just tell them that Kenya has diverse communities. We are about 42…I mean we try avoiding talking about ethnicity, I would try to avoid it because if you bring it up it is like telling them you, you are Kalenjin and you, and you are a kikuyu, a Luo, no. We try to avoid that and tell them we are Kenyans and this is what we are supposed to do.

It is clear from this discussion that controversial issues in relation to ethnicity are avoided by introducing the discourse of sameness—“we are all Kenyans.” This discourse
parallels the discourse of colour blindness usually found in contexts where race is a controversial issue. Like the discourse of sameness, colour blindness ignores identities or differences, thereby making it difficult to challenge inequality and injustice in society (Apple, 2003; Applebaum, 2005; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Knight, 2008). Dei (2004) reminds us that for people to deal with the asymmetrical power relations within schools, they need to appreciate and acknowledge social difference. For Teacher Katungwa, the best strategy of dealing with difference was to tell students the government treated them equally. At times when it became unavoidable to mention issues pertaining to land and ethnic clashes, she sought other strategies to gloss over the issues:

It is just the other day I talked to Form 1Y. I told them that people move; people migrate because of several reasons. In the present day Kenya we have communities who have moved. They are all over the country looking for land; they are looking for a place for their business and this movement has also brought conflicts in the present-day Kenya. And I mentioned in passing about the ethnic clashes in Eldoret and other parts of the country. People from Central Kenya moved looking for land and were also forced to move by the political powers of that particular time. They were forced to because their land was taken away. So I told them the conflicts are still there today. But you know even if we are mentioning that at times we mention without putting a lot of…a lot of emphasis on it so that they don’t see; they don’t take it. Like for example when we talk about the people from Central Province who moved to the Rift Valley to look for land because their land was taken by the powers of um…after independence. The leaders in Central Kenya took away their land, and these people were told, Move to the Rift Valley there is free land. Unaona? (You see?). Now in such a scenario, as a teacher, we need not emphasize such that much. But we are just learning history. Talking about such things, talking about people from their motherland brings conflicts. But
telling them you know the country belongs to us. We are Kenyans. So the people who are fighting over land should not do that.

Teacher Katungwa’s safe approach was to mention issues pertaining to ethnicity and violence “without putting a lot of emphasis so that they (students) don’t see.” This is an approach that is taken by many teachers in Africa (Dei, 2004). However, the approach works against the objective of promoting national integration because if issues that cause conflict in society are avoided or superficially addressed, if students are not given opportunities to deliberate on sensitive issues, then the goals of teaching history and government will be undermined. One of the goals of history (read civic education) is to help students to be actively engaged in discussions of public issues. Avery (2007) points out that such political engagement fosters students’ political knowledge, skills and participation.

In the excerpt that follows, it seems that Teacher Katungwa was aware of the significance of discussing controversial issues but avoided doing so because she wanted to adhere to the syllabus. The fact that teacher Katungwa felt compelled by the official curriculum to tell students that they were all Kenyans is a clear indication that the government uses the discourse of national unity to create and maintain a sense of shared national identity and cohesion among citizens (Bickmore, 2008), sometimes at the expense of the very citizens. It seems that the history and government curricular content is controlled to serve that purpose; it promotes national identity by advancing the myth of sameness, as is referred to by hooks (1992 as cited in Knight, 2008).

Teacher Katungwa seems to be caught up in a complex situation that is familiar to teachers whose ability to create an open classroom climate is restricted by school administration in many contexts (Apple & Beane, 1995; Myers, 2005). For example, a study
by Myers (2005) that compared the pedagogy of teachers in schools in Porto Alegre, Brazil and Toronto, Canada indicates that Toronto teachers felt restricted in discussing controversial citizenship themes and political issues in their classrooms (p. 250). Although these teachers were politically active outside their schools, they felt rather vulnerable, and like Teacher Katungwa, they were conscious of the potential for reprimands or repercussions when they discussed controversial issues. This complex situation that Teacher Katungwa finds herself in was further revealed when she explained how prescriptive the syllabus was, yet there was the need to discuss issues of fairness. She explained:

No, no, no, we don’t go that far in the syllabus. The syllabus doesn’t allow that because it is history and all that. But for me sometimes I do. Sometimes we discuss. I tell them I am sorry sometimes we have to work things out. Sometimes I ask questions like do you think it was fair for things to happen like this? By the way it can take a whole hour or so because [in a lowered voice] you know an issue that touches on ethnicity is very sensitive. Ukiiazisha, nika kufungulia nyuki (starting a debate on such issues is like setting bees free). Even in Form 1, if you talk about politics, unless you tell them to stop—you tell them, now let’s stop. That lesson will not continue…You know the learners have internalized what happened. You know …I understand this area was affected by the clashes…I understand that some learners could even say that we are now going to fight... So they still are bitter about it. They have a lot of bitterness. Most of them lost things; some of them lost their parents. So that is why ukifungulia hivi (if you give them the slightest opportunity), they will just talk about it.

For Teacher Katungwa, discussing ethnic clashes was important (although it was usually avoided) because, apart from helping students get rid of the bitterness they had internalized, it helps students to think of ways of changing the country:
I think when they talk about it, you are trying to heal them [you help them heal]...I tell them you are young people by the time you will be the leaders; I think you should change some of these things. Mmejionea [you have seen it for yourselves].

Teacher Katungwa’s remarks echoed Greene’s (1993) words who contends that it is important to allow young people to look at issues through multiple perspectives because it may help them to build bridges among themselves and by listening to a range of human stories “they may be provoked to heal and to transform” (p. 16). Thus, like Greene, Teacher Katungwa’s final comments here underscored the fact that engaging students in political discussions may help students, the future leaders, to see the need to “fight” for a better tomorrow. In addition, she views such discussions as therapeutic despite their digressing from the “real” lesson. One clear message here is that Teacher Katungwa would like to discuss some of the controversial issues but tries to avoid them because the syllabus “does not allow” teachers to do so; bringing in controversial issues into the classroom would be perceived as diverting from the prescribed curriculum, which may interfere with the coverage of the syllabus. This may also interfere with the peace and tranquility that the administration expects teachers to maintain in their classrooms. This illuminates the complexities—the tensions and contradictions that characterize the teaching of history in Kenya. Apple and Jungck (1992) remind us that “lives of teachers in the classrooms are controlled and are subject to administrative logics that seek to also control teaching and curriculum” (p. 23). It is in this world of complexities that Teacher Katungwa tries to make sense of the curriculum.

Unlike Teacher Katungwa, Teacher Hekima explained she did not have major concerns about discussing controversial issues in the classroom, even ethnic clashes that were still in the minds of students. She explained:
We normally talk about ethnic groups and ethnic clashes. Sometimes this brings some heat in the classroom because of the different ethnic groups. Also, the cultural differences of different ethnic groups—you find such issues bringing some heat in the class because students say this group is this way, they don’t get circumcised, others get circumcised—that kind of thing.

But such issues we are able to handle in the class, actually head-on because we have to ensure that trait does not occur…We reprimand. We tell them that it is wrong.

Literature that addresses issues of dialogue in the classroom suggests that students ought to be allowed to express their different views (Bickmore, 2008; Bridges, 1979; Hahn, 1998).

Bridges, for example, brings to our attention that discussing issues should not be about whose answer is right and whose answer is wrong, when he explains:

On the first conception of discussion and decision-making, those participating are engaged in a disinterested pursuit of the right or correct decision. They are concerned to uncover and examine all the relevant arguments and evidence and expect that this examination will demonstrate which is the right or at least the best available course of action. The value free and open discussion as the means by which as much evidence as possible and as full a range of opinions and arguments as possible may be brought to bear on the issue under consideration. In this kind of procedure, then, the decision-making resembles as nearly as possible the activity of pure enquiry. (1979, p. 133)

To Bridges, then, students should be allowed to freely express their opinion no matter how different that opinion is from the opinions of the rest of the students. The importance of open discussion is further stressed by Hahn (1998) who contends that it is important to give students the opportunity to express themselves because only then can they “perceive their class to have an “open climate” where they are encouraged to explore and express differing views on controversial public issues” (p. 179). However, when the opinions of those in authority dominate any discussions, those who hold less power, like students, learn to be
silenced because they learn to devalue their own knowledge while they legitimize other people’s views (Gentles, 2003). Consequently, possibilities for developing critical consciousness among students are acutely limited.

Seemingly, for Teacher Katungwa and Teacher Hekima, effective lessons are those where opposing views should be suppressed, thereby allowing order to prevail in the classroom. However, Christensen (1994) contends that if classrooms model what should happen in the broader society, students should be allowed to discuss issues freely. For her, “real community is forged out of struggle. Students will not always agree on issues and the fights, arguments, tears and anger are the crucible from which a real community grows (pp. 50-51). Echoing this argument, King and Apple (2004) point out that conflicts should not always be viewed as negative because “conflicts are the systematic products of the changing structure of society and by their very nature tend to lead to progress” (p. 97).

Teacher Aminata, who also said she weaves in discussions on ethnicity in her lessons, explained she does so by “telling” students about ethnicity and ethnic clashes, not by inviting students to hold discussions on the issues.

I give them examples about what happened in our country some years ago. And of course you predict that whatever happened in the past can happen again any other time…Like tribal clashes which happened before the elections. You give them examples of why people were chasing others from their place. You tell them they were saying it was their land. You teach them in this world you cannot live alone. I tell them that when you look at yourself as belonging to a tribe, it destroys your mind. So when I ask them who is your neighbour, who is sitting next to you and when I find that they are seated with someone from a different ethnic group I really congratulate them. I keep on encouraging them you need to interact and from there you see smiles on
students’ faces. You know in this world you can’t live alone. You see you are happy because you have a friend from a different community. So I normally see their reaction is normally good. I tell them ethnicity is bad. If you belong to a community you have to appreciate, but you should know that belonging to a community is not enough. You have to depend on other people. I think they feel good about it because they learn something.

This excerpt suggests that Teacher Aminata explained to her students the importance of appreciating people from other ethnic groups and also emphasized the importance of focusing on their national identity rather than their ethnic identity. Although the syllabus indicates one of the objectives of teaching history and government is to help students appreciate their ethnic identity, Teacher Aminata did not think excluding some ethnic groups from the curriculum was a major concern. To her, what was important is to “make them [students] understand we are all Kenyans and we need each other.” Once again, the dominant discourse of national unity that is prevalent in many African contexts (Dei, 2004) emerged.

As the above excerpt reveals, Teacher Aminata was passionate about promoting a national identity through which peace could be realized. For her, celebrating diversity in terms of ethnic groups would not promote unity and as such, having students embracing their national identity was an effective way of addressing issues related to ethnicity.

In support of John Dewey, H. Giroux (1991) points out that liberal education should provide people with the opportunity to grapple with the deepest problems in society in order to acquire the knowledge, the skills and ethical responsibility that would allow them to participate actively in a democracy. Therefore, critically examining social structures that create ethnic strife would be a worthwhile discussion for students (H. Giroux, 1991).
Having open discussions on social issues was also embraced by the curriculum
developer who felt that students can easily relate to the issues.

I think that [social issues] is very, very important because that is something
students can relate to very easily. And I think in my view um that is key
because some of the problems that I see in the country would be um … um
much less if at all students got the understanding very clearly. I’m talking here
about some of the social…particularly economic challenges that we have had
and even political. That kind of knowledge I think would um inform the
students so that they could become much, much better citizens, and they
would probably have to deal with some of the political issues that we are
having around right now.

The curriculum developer underscored the need to enhance students’ political
awareness by explicitly discussing social, economic and political issues that students
encounter in their everyday lives in the classroom. In addition, he noted the need for students
to make connections between what they read as history and what is currently happening in
the country. To emphasize the importance of connecting the past with the present, the
curriculum developer explained that students would, for instance, have a better understanding
of multiparty democracy and alluded to the violence that is usually witnessed during
multiparty elections in Kenya:

You look and see at the emergence of political opposition parties and how this
was not embraced in the mid-sixties, and I think a student who probably
understands this for instance would appreciate the importance of multiparty
democracy today and might not want to release some of those … umm
tendencies [ethnic violence] that we have seen in the past. They need to look
at the party politics of the sixties and compare it with party politics of today.
They need to look at social problems in history and compare them with what is happening today.

This kind of connection is an excellent gateway for discussing social issues that are often times masked in the wider society. Relating history to current events is grounding the curriculum in students’ lives (Peterson, 1994); not only does history become alive in the classroom (Miner, 1994), but it also becomes relevant and fun to the students.

**Enlivening Civic Lessons**

Classrooms are arenas where the goals of civic education can be realized. For this to happen, teachers are required to actively engage students in discussions of public issues, in making connections between complex democratic concepts and their communities, in simulations of democratic processes, and in linking service learning experiences with civic outcomes (Avery, 2007, p. 32). This would mean incorporating learning activities that are relevant and practical. If this is overlooked, those arenas could easily become dormitories where students take naps before they rush to their next lesson. This message was clearly articulated by, Peter, one of the student participants: “This is about liking history. It is a boring subject. I take it as a boring subject plus I don’t concentrate… So I just want to sleep. I only like the topic of citizenship.”

Peter went further to explain the only interesting topic in the history and government course was citizenship because the topic “made sense.” Students’ lack of interest in some topics and their interest in the topic of citizenship also emerged during my interview with Teacher Hekima, who was Peter’s teacher:

Migration is a topic that actually gives problems to our students. You realize that most of them, they are trying just to memorize the events of migration;
for example the Bantu migrated from here to there, for one or two reasons; the Cushites etcetera. And then there is a tendency of forgetting a few things when it comes to a topic like migration. But a topic like citizenship, you test them anytime they give you the answers. If you go to form 4 right now, this topic they did in Form 1, but they have the answers.

To make the topic on migration interesting, Teacher Hekima explained she tries to show students’ the relevance of studying the topic:

We try to make them understand that they are getting a background about where they are coming from. Because the nation we are now—Kenya—of different ethnic communities, we all came together at some point and we are trying to give them a history of our ancestry and it is important to know where they are coming from.

This discussion suggests that students might not be interested in a topic like migration because of its lack of authenticity; it is far removed from students’ real life. Students can only view it as something of the past that they must commit to memory in order to pass their tests. It also seems that helping students to make connections between the past and the present is not necessary; what is most important is to know the origin of the ethnic groups.

When I asked Teacher Aminata of Lango High School how she attempted to relate past events to current events to make learning relevant, she responded:

You find that the syllabus in history is arranged in a sequence. The topics are arranged from what happened in the past, what happened a few years ago and what is happening now.

According to Teacher Aminata’s response, it would seem that a teacher has to follow a chronological order, implying that relating past events to current events is not required.
Given that there is little evidence that teachers participating in the study made connections between past and present events, I was curious to know the kind of activities they incorporated in topics such as citizenship and national integration to promote democratic practices. The activities were explained as follows:

**Teacher Aminata:** I can use illustrations. For example when someone steals what happens? If a person rapes another what happens? So I create a picture in their mind that stealing is bad.

**Teacher Katungwa:** Normally in history there is nothing much. But at times you just put them in groups to discuss issues. You give them a topic; they discuss and come up with the answers.

**Teacher Hekima:** Um…we are able to promote this kind of education by involving students from different communities and to give information on their communities. It really helps. Sometimes I give them something to discuss then have it presented in class or a take-away kind of discussion because when they hold discussions they are able to internalize what they discuss.

Teacher Aminata’s response confirmed what the observations had revealed: both teachers at Lango High School used exposition, and students only participated when they answered questions or asked questions, which was rare. Therefore, in terms of learning activities, the comment made by Teacher Katungwa, “in history there is nothing much,” is a reflection of what was actually observed. Unlike Teacher Aminata and Teacher Katungwa, Teacher Hekima and Teacher Syombua, both of whom taught at Kapan High School had a different approach to teaching. In one of the informal conversations I had had with Teacher Syombua, she had mentioned that the students were quite empowered. She later confirmed this in my interview with her when I asked her what classroom activities she used:
Content delivery is learner-centred um…so we have discussions, presentations most of the time, and it is learner-centred; they come up with what they intend to learn…Mine is to give them guidelines.

She further explained that to enhance democracy in her classroom, she encouraged students to express their views through class discussions and through group presentations.

The observation data show, as reported by Teacher Hekima and Teacher Syombua, that they employed what they called “student-centred” strategies which involved “discussions” and presentations. There is no evidence, however, that suggest students exercise their reasoning powers by expressing their views or opinions. Their discussions involved retelling facts from the textbook and presenting the facts to the rest of the students. Teacher Syombua, who had just completed a master’s degree, was well aware of the need to use strategies that would elicit students’ voice and tried to incorporate them in her teaching. Despite the fact that these activities did not lead to critical thinking and were not actually student-centred, students, even those who did not have these activities as part of their learning experience, embraced them. Students gave several reasons for this:

**Linda:** I like presentations because the people who are presenting speak a language that you can understand easily instead of the high class language the teacher uses then you cannot understand. It also helps you develop self-confidence.

**Bernard:** I enjoy presentations because they make one to be courageous, develop English skills; you see one cannot use Kiswahili. You just develop your language slowly. And it makes one to know how to express himself or herself.
**Jane:** … For one about myself, I like public speaking and so when I go in front of the other students and they concentrate and when I teach them it boosts my self-esteem.

**Melisa:** I also like presentations because you are given time to go and do your own research and then we help each other. So when you are presenting, you gain self-confidence and also you learn what you are not able to learn if the teacher is teaching you and when I am writing information from the presenters. When you write something that you have not copied from the book I think it sticks to your mind and you can remember it for a long time.

**Eli:** We were introduced to presentations by our teacher but we are just starting. It is a good idea because you present it in front of the other students so it makes you strong (meaning confident) and you also share ideas.

A recurring theme in these comments was that these activities fostered students’ communication skills because they helped them gain confidence. Of particular importance to students, also, was the need to incorporate debates. This is expressed in the following comments from the four classes.

**Robert:** Me I like debates because they help me to express what I feel in my heart.

**Saha:** Debates are good. We can choose the topic and then discuss with other students and get more details on it, for example advantages and disadvantages.

**Lydia:** and also when we debate for example looking for solutions about for example which theory is correct evolution of man or creation theory we develop our critical thinking. …I mean you think, just think. You think for example if this was to be done, what would be the consequences or the results?
Lydia’s statement clearly points to the fact that debating can promote future
democratic citizens who have the ability to examine different points of view to solve
problems or make decisions. Lydia’s understanding of debate does not involve competition
but “what Freire (1993) refers to as dialogue, where no person imposes his or her idea over
another. Freire explains that

This dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s depositing ideas
into another, nor can it become the simple exchange of ideas to be
“consumed” by discussants. Nor is it a polemical argument between those
who are committed neither to the naming of the world, not to the search for
the truth, but rather to the imposition of their own truth. (p. 89)

Constructivists contend that if students are to be prepared to become active citizens,
they should be provided with opportunities where they can test what they have learned by
comparing it with what they already knew in order to construct new meanings or
understanding. Thus, if classrooms are to be places for democratic communication, it is
necessary for communication to reach what Freire (1993) describes as “the point of
encounter.” This is where “there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are
only people who are attempting together to learn more than they know” (p. 90). This points
to what Saha expresses when she says debates are discussions where students learn from
other students, and in more detail, about a topic. Though the above students conceptualize
debates as discussing issues and looking for solutions, it is clear that such “debates” would
encourage learners to learn how to think. This would also create a climate where students feel
encouraged to express their opinions (Soto, 1999).

Students also felt that educational trips to supplement what they have learned in class
would be very helpful.
**Mark:** I think we should include field work. After every topic we should have field work where we go and see it with our eyes, even visiting parliament like that—knowing what is happening at that place.

**Eli:** I would like to add on what Mark has said. Even if we are doing presentations we need to visit museums so that we can see the tools the early people used to dig.

**Ondoro:** Going to trips we can know about types of traditions that many people have. For example, when you go to Kariandusi or Al Gazel or to national park you can know traditions of people and also know how man evolved by going to see their bones.

**Bernard:** yes it is good to go out for further research. You see there are people who fear teachers and they can’t ask questions so when they go to a museum you find a social person who will explain to you.

The absence of these activities may explain Peter’s earlier remark that history was boring. His last remark underscores the need to employ activities that guarantee students’ participation and make learning relevant: “I wonder why we don’t have practicals like going to parliament to see for ourselves and know this is the truth instead of those things [laughter].” As Peter later explained, “those things” that he was referring to were the explanations teachers gave in class.

Students were also unenthusiastic about writing notes either dictated by the teacher or from their textbooks.

**Bernard:** When we are told to write notes you see there are other people who cannot understand the textbook clearly. So when they are told to write notes they write exactly what is in the textbook.
Lydia: Okay, you see in the classroom the teacher may dictate notes and write but when the exams come and then you read the notes, you won’t know about those things you read and wrote are true or false. You just read because it is a matter of reading to pass the exam.

Frank: So far I don’t think we have done any activities. We just write notes and the teacher comes and explains it, so there are some people who cannot understand it. Maybe if we are told go to the Internet do research and get more but the teacher will just come explain then ask who has not understood and most of the people are scared. So you can’t just express yourself so it would better if you just go to the Internet and you research. The school should make available the Internet, the books, like when we are discussing politics we should involve a democrat or a politician so that we can know what we are being taught. Writing notes is an activity but it is more frustrating to write notes, read them and you will never understand. It is just like you have wasted your energy… I think history and government would be much better if there is a lot of research. For instance as we said about the many tribes, in class may be there will be an activity—the teacher can tell us you are of this ethnic group, now tell us about your origin… yeah and now about that you know today many people are not keen on their culture so it would be better if the government would create a website for ethnic groups and now when you are given an assignment by the teacher you just go to the library and look up everything. So it is not just for assignments but you could learn about the tribes’ backgrounds.

Classroom democratic practices require that, in an effort to include all students in the learning process, teachers use eclectic pedagogical strategies (Wiles & Bondi, 2007). According to Wiles and Bondi, if this does not happen, “students may become bored and listless, perform poorly on tests, get discouraged about the curriculum and their own capability” (p. 166). The remarks from students suggest that some students felt excluded.
from the learning process because they did not understand the notes they wrote. In addition, this kind of learning treated students as recipients of knowledge, not as people who were capable of constructing knowledge. Their task was to copy what Liu and Matthews (2005) called hard-wired knowledge from the teacher or from the textbooks which they would later reproduce on examinations. Frank’s views represented many students’ who felt that learning should include authentic activities. For Frank, inviting guest speakers such as “a democrat or a politician so that we can know what we are being taught” would certainly enhance their political knowledge. Another student, Okello, felt that it is by being immersed into the real world that he would grasp what he learned in the history class; real life experiences were central to his learning. He explained:

There in parliament there are activities that are going on like debating of how to develop our constituencies and by going there, you are going to get a view of what the parliament looks like and you are going to learn as you listen to how business is carried out in parliament. We can also get people who will tell us how the constitution is made in Kenya.

The need for authentic activities was also expressed by Keith who felt by using simulation, students could create their own social world with real life experiences in their classroom:

I don’t know how I can describe it. The activity of a judge many people sitting there and a lawyer sitting there with his or her client. Yes, acting. I would enjoy that so much.

These students were actually echoing what the curriculum developer had earlier pointed out. He had expressed concern that pedagogical activities undermined the goals of civic education because the activities used did not link what students learned to what was
happening in their real world. He enumerated varied teaching activities that he said would be devoid of too much teacher talk:

and on top of that, history I think should be made a very practical subject—practical in the sense that right now umm most of what happens during history lessons students sit and umm may be the teacher talks… But if at all history could be much more practical in the sense we could have field visits, they visit more of these museums, umm some historical sites and umm for instance they come and visit the parliament for government, I think quite of these objectives could be achieved at a higher level than they are at now…Another thing I could add that I believe would help in the achievement of these objectives is really try and make history very, very current. Um sometimes—although I think this also falls in line with abstractness—sometimes when you study things that maybe happened 200 years ago, you don’t quite see how it interfaces with today. I think there are a lot of things that happened which could be worth studying, for instance, very relevant things like in 1994 we had the genocide in Rwanda, that kind of stuff—students would find it very interesting because now with the perforation of electronics and print media, these are things that they can see on television and read in the newspapers. Again talking about media, I think media can come in handy in the achievement of these objectives—our format of delivery—I am glad now at KIE we are developing e-content for most of the areas in history and government. I think that traditional approach where the students are to read books particularly you know in primary, in secondary—books alone might not quite really give the students a kick. Today they want to watch videos and that kind of thing. These are things that I feel would really help in the achievement of these objectives.

These views echo the findings of studies carried out in many parts of the world. Many studies done in Africa reveal students sit and listen to whatever the teacher says and speak only when they are called upon to answer questions, individually or chorally (Arthur, 1994;
Teaching practices have been reported as so authoritarian that they have rendered students voiceless and powerless. This is also common in North America. A study carried out by Chiodo and Byford (2004) reveals that students are not interested in civic education because teachers lecture instead of using a variety of techniques such as discussions and debates. This was also observed by Burstein et al. (2006) who points out that teachers in California tend to use teacher-centred approach to teaching instead of student-centred approach. As suggested by the curriculum developer, visiting places such as the parliament would make civic education more practical and relevant. Furthermore, it would help students connect what they learn with what actually happens in their social world. In support of such an approach are Ehrlich (1999), and John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey (1914) who believe that a child learns more effectively when s/he enters into the social world.

Students can also bring their social world into the classroom by way of acting or simulation (Morris, 2001).

The curriculum developer also suggested that current history such as the 1994 Rwanda genocide, and incorporation of electronic media in lessons could actually enhance students’ engagement in history lessons. Undoubtedly, this would reduce teacher talk in the class. However, the suggestion also raises two questions: would the discussion of the Rwanda genocide lead students to the discussion of the so-called ethnic cleansing in their country, or would it only mask the discussion of the students own “current history” that has violence too? Given that many schools do not have access to electricity or those that do may not have televisions or computers, how feasible is this suggestion? Whether this suggestion would work in the Kenyan context or not, it is evident that the curriculum developer is well
aware of the need to move from teacher talk to allow students to actively participate in their learning. This view is well summarized by Peterson (1994) who points out that “approaches based on lecturing by teachers, passive reading of textbooks and “fill-in-the-blanks” worksheets keep students from becoming actively involved in their learning, and from learning how to think and communicate effectively” (p. 34).

**Student Voice**

Student voice is discussed in the context of schooling in general. Paying attention to issues of voice emerged as an important theme during my interview with Kapana principal. It was important to include this theme because school administrators play a crucial role in enabling and sustaining student voice initiatives, within schools and in classrooms. Thus, by examining student voice in the broader school context, I hoped to gain insight into the school culture and climate, aspects that are closely linked to what happens in the classroom. During the conversation with Kapana principal, she pointed out that effective history teaching and learning would help students to voice their grievances to the government later in life instead of resorting to violence. This prompted me to ask her what channels were available for students through which they could practice voicing their grievances. Kapana principal enumerated multiple channels all of which she said worked effectively:

This one… I would say there are channels. I would like to say that the administration in many schools, including this one, is a little bit more authoritarian whereby we have the principal at the top there, then the deputy—the whole chain of command….But um like in this school we have the suggestion box. The students were able to say anything they wanted—I mean they would just write anything. They would—I mean they would just write anything. Personally I don’t mind because it is a way of feedback. I am
able to get students’ feedback about their feelings, what they want, the grievances, I am able to know that way and some of it actually was also very constructive because they would say we have not been taught for this amount of time. The other thing is baraza. I know some schools hold barazas. You may not know what a baraza is. A baraza is a kind of conference but not of that magnitude. Like you can have a kind of meeting with a form 4 class, sometimes with the whole school, but it works better if it is one Form (grade). And then in that meeting—the difference between that meeting and any other meeting is that you allow them to say whatever they want. They voice anything. Any grievance, any issue whether it touches you in a very sensitive way you just pretend that it is all right. That way they are able to talk it out, they are able to voice whatever they have and that way they are able to release pressure and stress. And I think that works very well with me.

As Kapana principal spoke of the effectiveness of the conferences, I was aware that even in the promotion of student voices, one can easily relegate some voices to the margins. I was therefore curious to know whether female student voices were included in the conversations, so I asked Kapana principal how often girls participated in the discussions:

First of all I don’t go with the teachers—these are my barazas. I would expect feedback. Girls will talk, but we also realize girls may also not talk in such a baraza, so sometimes we also have girls’ meetings. And more often than not we have girls’ meetings. Of course we have boys’ meetings but we have more girls’ meetings than boys,’ so that they are more able to talk about their issues. They talk about what they feel about everything—like one time they said they felt the time-table was not gender sensitive. So they just say anything, so it is a very good method to get feedback.

The principal also explained that there were peer counselors and prefects who acted as mediators between the students and the administration.
Peer counsellors are able to give very good feedback to the teachers through the guidance and counselling department and sometimes directly. So when there is a problem, they are able to talk to their peers. The other day students had refused to take tea and bread because we had reduced the slices by one—slices of bread (laughter) and they sent their peers to the office because the whole class cannot come to the office. They sent their peers, the peers talked about it and we were able to resolve it and they took the 3 slices. They accepted. They saw sense and they were able to communicate the same to their peers… We also have our prefects, and we are able to train them so that they do not become too harsh on the students; they do become too harsh. So the prefects can also be a bridge between the administration and the students. And when we feel there is excessive use of punishment or force, we come in… They really are able to function well because they have the support of the students—of course may be not all of them… They are not happy with some of them especially when they realize that some of them are tough. And maybe that is the reason why this school has never actually had a strike. Even when every school went on strike, we were spared.

From this explanation, it seemed that peer counselors did not only act as mediators between the student body and the administration, but they were also used by the school to quell any dissatisfaction or grievances that students may have. It is therefore not clear whether the counselors served the interests of the students or the interests of the administration or both. This notwithstanding, having peer counselors may be an effective way of teaching students “leadership” skills.

According to Kapana principal, peer counselors were a distinct group from prefects, whom she viewed as another channel of communication. As the discussion continued, however, it was clear that the prefects did not act as the voice of the student body only but also as the administration’s “eye” or police. In fact, the existence of prefects seemed to
contradict all the democratic practices that the principal had enumerated: The picture Kapana principal painted of the prefects reflected the kind of authoritarianism that she had earlier mentioned. The prefects acted as agents of oppression because they were used by the administration to intimidate and control the rest of the students. They had the power to punish and to silence those who did not “toe the line.” The existence of prefects is part of the unofficial or the hidden curriculum that teaches students to remain in total obedience because there are consequences if the reverse happens; it creates an atmosphere of fear among students because they are aware they are being watched. This prefecture system is a remnant of the British colonial system. Writing about student voice in Europe, Davies (2002) points out that student councils and committees are a surveillance mechanism that does not allow students to move or see outside the traditional regulatory frameworks. Given that some of these prefects are in charge of classes, one wonders how silenced students feel.

The findings indicate that Kapana principal made an effort to create spaces where democracy would thrive, and as she acknowledged, some of the practices used worked against the very democratic climate she attempted to foster. This paradox also emerged as other participants gave their views on classroom activities.

Conclusion

The majority of the participants viewed history as an important subject that had the potential for fostering peace and making the society a better place in that it would mould students into good, responsible citizens. Thus, history was viewed as a positive socializing agent that would lead students to participate in nation building as compliant citizens. Participation was perceived as abiding by the laws and regulations set by institutions. Both the teachers and the students did not conceptualize participation as emancipatory whereby
oppressed students could have a voice to challenge injustices. Consequently, some teachers felt that discussing controversial issues would be overstepping the boundaries because it would destabilize the “peace” in the classroom.

Students expressed that employment of diverse teaching practices would make the course more interesting and relevant. Other students, though a negligible number, felt that editing history content whereby students could not discuss the ills of the government denied students the opportunity to critique and hold healthy debates on government issues.

From the discussions with educators and the curriculum developer, it seemed that history fell short of promoting peace and democracy due to the many challenges that teachers faced. One of those complexities, as expressed by Teacher Katungwa, was the fear of being reprimanded or losing one’s job for discussing issues deemed controversial and sensitive, even when one believed such issues promoted peace and justice. Another complexity emerged when teachers had to balance between teaching in order to cover the syllabus well enough for students to pass examinations, and teaching important issues that would help students develop into active citizens. Thus, while the official curriculum seems to promote peace, democracy and justice, there is little evidence that the enacted curriculum does. Teachers painted portraits of themselves caught up in a web of challenges that influenced the way they enacted the curriculum. Findings also revealed that teachers had devised coping strategies that helped them navigate through the challenges. However, there were those challenges teachers did not seem to be aware of because they perceived them as part of their reality or simply because they were not aware they existed. No matter how effective the teachers might have wanted to be, their efforts were inhibited by the multiple challenges they had to face in their professional lives.
Participants also acknowledged the need to empower students by providing opportunities for students to express their views. This, they explained, was done through group presentations and class discussions. In the wider school setting, this was done by creating channels through which students could communicate to the administration.
Chapter Six:  
Civic Education in Kenya:  
Pedagogy in the Classroom

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented how stakeholders—teachers, students, principals and one curriculum developer made sense of the history and government course. Highlighted in this presentation is the significant role the course is supposed to play in shaping students to become responsible students. In this chapter, I narrate how history and government teachers at Kapanha High School and Lango High School adapted and shaped the official curriculum and how they attempted to weave in the concepts of peace, democracy and social justice in their lessons. I also discuss the extent to which the kind of pedagogical practices teachers employed fostered “the skills and values of critical awareness, participation, involvement and community” (Osborne, 1995, p. 42).

Visiting a place where one had once lived for many years quickly brings back memories of the past. Gentles (2003) recounts how she remembered her past when she went back to Jamaica, where she had been partly schooled and where she had worked, to conduct research. Her experience resonated with me quite well because I had a similar experience when I went back to Kenya where I was born, raised and educated. As I stepped into the first classroom at Lango High School, I felt like I had gone back in time. The classroom reminded me of my high school days in Kenya, where, clad in uniform, I waited to receive knowledge from teachers. The classrooms were similar to the classrooms I had learnt in. Students’ desks which were arranged in rows faced the teacher. In both schools each class had at least 48
students, one third of whom were female. Because the rooms were small, teachers and students’ movement was restricted.

One thing was different, though. Students did not stand up when the teacher walked into the classroom, but as soon as the teacher walked in students quickly put away their books and got ready for the lesson. Teachers rarely greeted the students, which would have been unfathomable during my time.

As I got ready for the first lesson as a researcher, I knew it was difficult to keep my identity fixed. I had been educated in Kenya under circumstances not very different from the current students’ circumstances, and as a high school teacher in Kenya, I had taught in similar classrooms. Therefore, as my past experiences unfolded in my mind, I became a border-crosser—I was a student, a teacher and a researcher. Yet I knew I was not that passive student; I knew I was no longer that teacher I used to be because, like Gentles (2003), I had learnt to read the world through a critical lens. With this critical lens, I had come to observe pedagogical practices in classrooms that were once my world.

**Pedagogy in the Classroom**

Lessons at both schools were 40 minutes long and because teachers had to cover the syllabus within the stipulated time, they sometimes taught on Saturdays or arranged to teach students after school.

Classes started on time and rarely would a student come in late. Those who did had good reasons for doing so. For example, students who had not paid tuition fees would be accompanied by their parents to plead with the principal to be allowed to attend classes.
Given that lessons were only 40 minutes, students were not expected to ask for permission to go out; they stayed in class until their next break.

Teachers at Lango High School and Kapana High School did not carry their attendance registers to class. Instead, they briefly looked around and noted the names of students who were absent and immediately started teaching. If a student had missed classes for several days, teachers often asked students if they knew what was happening to the student. These teachers could be described as educators who cared about their students and wanted their students to be successful in life. The remarks below exemplify this.

**Teacher Hekima:** When you meet your students out there and they are doing well, you feel so good.

**Teacher Syombua:** I make them enjoy the subject and when they enjoy the subject then they should do well.

**Teacher Aminata:** I want to see the lives of these young ones change.

**Teacher Katungwa:** But all in all I try my best to ensure they understand and pass their exams.

Although the term success can have varied conceptualizations, it was evident that teachers used whatever pedagogical strategies they believed would help their students succeed. Success here was perceived as passing examinations which, hopefully, would lead to admission to university or college and eventually to securing jobs.

**Pedagogical strategies: Kapana High School.**

At Kapana High School, students were required to read sections of their textbooks ahead of the teacher and summarize most of the topics. Teachers only went in to review what
students had already read. This was done by asking students factual questions that required them to recall answers. Consequently, classes were characterized by recitation sessions to check students’ comprehension. If students did not give all the points the teacher expected them to give, she took up the points which the students were expected to add to their notes. Other times the teacher would explain some key points and then she would dictate notes. In other cases, students read topics individually; then in groups they presented the information to the rest of the class. In what follows is an excerpt that demonstrates how Teacher Hekima conducted one of her review lessons. Given that students were expected to have read the textbook and written notes, what Teacher Hekima did was to ask questions and add omitted points.


The class was on a new topic, Contact between East Africa and the Outside World. Students had already been told to read the topic and write notes. This was the third lesson on the topic. Teacher Hekima entered the classroom. She did not greet the students but went to the chalk board and wrote: Factors that promoted the growth of the Indian trade. She then turned and faced the students. The lesson began:

Teacher (T): What are the factors that led to the growth of the Indian Ocean trade? I want you to name them very fast.

Student (S): Availability of goods from the East African Coast and foreign countries

T: For example there were goods that were readily available such as cotton and ivory

S [students put up their hands to give more factors] Monsoon Winds

T: How did the Monsoon Winds promote trade?

S: The wind facilitated the movement of the ships

T: Very good

S: Peace and stability

T: Very good
S: There was already existing trade

S: There were enterprising merchants who were able to establish links with the outside world

T: Yes, there was the existence of the Indian Banyans. What did they do?

S: Banyans were able to provide credit

T: There were also natural harbours. What is the importance of good harbours?

S: They ensured the safe docking of the vessels for fuelling and offloading of goods.

T: There was also accessibility to the coast. [She then wrote on the board: The impact of trade]. In the exam, you might be asked about the impact, effects, results or consequences. All these words mean the same. What were the effects of the trade?

S: Development of towns

S: Intermarriage

T: What was the result of the intermarriage?

S: The intermarriage between Arabs and coastal people gave rise to the Swahili community.

T: They speak Swahili and the have a distinct culture. Kiswahili is a mixture of what languages?

S: Bantu and Arabic languages

T: What other effects?

S: High demand of ivory led to the destruction of natural resources

T: For example rhinoceros horns, tortoise shells

S: Introduction of new crops.

S: Introduction of currency

T: Very good

S: They promoted unity

S: It led to the introduction of other languages at the coast for example Arabic and Persian

S: Slave trade led to the suffering of Africans.
T: Foreigners settled at the coast. There was also the introduction of new laws such as the Sharia Law. There was also the introduction of Madrasa and the spread of Arab and Persian cultures. There was a decline of iron working. Why was there a decline?

S: Traders brought in cheaper tools.

T: [She wrote the coming of Portuguese to the East Coast on the board]. When did the Portuguese come to East Africa?

S: [Choral answer] 1498.

T: What were the reasons for the coming of the Portuguese to the coast?

S: [Hands shot up]. They were looking for the sea-route to India

S: They were adventurous

S: They came to spread Christianity and to curb the spread of Islam

S: They wanted to establish trade with the East Africans

S: They came to look for raw materials

S: East Africa was strategic in order to get water on their way to India

T: Portuguese also had a well-developed technology. They had ships called carrack [She then wrote on the board, Portuguese conquest of East Africa]. Which year did Vasco Da Gama come to East Africa? [Students hesitated to answer]. Have you been reading your notes? [a hand went up]

S: Vasco Da Gama came to East Africa in 1498

T: The people in Mombasa were hostile so he moved to Malindi where he was welcomed. Why did Vasco Da Gama?

S: He was trying to trace the sea route to India.

T: So when he came he found a lucrative business of Sofala gold trade, the good harbours and the disunity among the coastal people. He advised the king of Portugal to conquer the East African coast. Why do you think disunity was important for the Portuguese? There are other people who came to the coast. Take your textbook and turn to page 98. Please share the books. In 1502 Vasco Da Gama organized another expedition and conquered Kilwa. [The bell rings]. Read about the expeditions made to conquer East Africa. Take notes of the events, years and the people involved.
These notes reveal a positive environment where the students actively participated in answering questions. However, like in many school contexts in Africa, the questions asked elicited factual answers that did not require students’ critical thinking (Fuller & Snyder, 1991; Prophet, 1995; Rowell, 1995). According to these scholars, when students are called upon to answer factual questions in class, they reproduce the “knowledge” they have memorized from their notebooks and textbooks. They also note that every move is teacher directed whereby the teacher asks questions and he or she chooses who will answer the questions. These “routinized pedagogical practices,” as they are referred to by Fuller and Snyder (1991), were observed in Teacher Hekima’s class. However, in her class, she did not only ask questions but she also added more facts whenever she thought necessary. In this particular lesson no student asked any question, which is another common characteristic found in most African schools (Fuller & Snyder, 1991). For the most part, the lesson was a recitation of historical facts that had no connection with the present. This, too, was not a unique case.

Recitation of facts appears to be the norm in many schools in Kenya and in Africa in general (Rowell, 1995). As noted by Rowell, this constant drilling of students on factual information is considered necessary for preparing students for the national examinations. He further notes that the closed-ended questions reflect the basic structure of national examinations in sub-Saharan Africa. According to Wane and Gathenya (2004), pressure to succeed in national examinations encourages students (and teachers) to resort to rote learning, at the expense of critical learning. This was also noted by Vavrus (2009) who reported that constructivism methods of teaching in Tanzania are hampered by standardized examinations. Thus, instead of teachers helping students to make connections between what
they learn and what they already know, students and teachers recite information that would be reproduced on examinations. John Dewey (1939) cautions us against such practice. He explains:

Admit that traditional education employed as the subject-matter for study facts and ideas so bound up with the past as to give little help in dealing with the issues of the present and future…Now we have the problem of discovering the connection which actually exists within experience between the achievements of the past and the issues of the present. We have the problem of ascertaining how acquaintance with the past may be translated into a potent instrumentality for dealing effectively with the future…How shall the young become acquainted with the past in such a way that the acquaintance is a potent agent in appreciation of the living present? (pp. 22-23)

Dewey here underscores the significance of making connections between the past and the present. The past can be used as a mirror of society through which students can look at the society and try to “correct” the society’s image for a better future. If this connection is not made, learning about the past loses its relevance.

In my interview with Teacher Hekima, she had articulated her belief that textbook information helped students to become better people and that she always encouraged them to read their textbooks to get information:

I encourage them to try and do a lot of reading—get facts because in the history class you find for example the lazy ones, they want to avoid reading because history involves a lot of reading in order to get information. They want to pick bits and pieces of information from here and there. In fact I encourage them to read the history textbooks they have, so they have a lot of information in order for them to be better people…I mean when they do readings, they get informed; they get information first hand unlike when they rely on hearsay. For example like now when we teach a topic like citizenship, there is so much …um like the rights of a child, etcetera. The kids will be
better informed when they read for themselves unlike when they rely on hearsay.

Jessop and Alan (1998) report that many teachers in Africa believe in transmitting the knowledge that is prescribed in the syllabus and as such they do not have the sense of ownership of the curriculum where they can adopt it to suit their own contexts. This was true of Teacher Hekima, who believed that “prepackaged knowledge” helped students to become “better people.” To her, the only “truth” students needed resided in their textbooks. Consequently, her lessons became sessions where students consumed knowledge without examining it critically (Galston, 2003) and her teaching practices gravitated towards the transmission orientation that views knowledge as a set of fixed facts (Miller & Seller, 1990). As already mentioned, this was largely due to the fact that teachers felt the need to teach to the test. However, this uncritical consumption of knowledge only dulls the mind and inhibits critical thinking (hooks, 2010; Peterson, 1994). It does not create opportunities where students can become knowledge producers.

Apart from the question and answer method, Teacher Hekima used exposition. At such times, she would read information from her notes, explain it to the students and then dictate notes to students or she would write notes on the board. She would also put students in groups to present topics they had covered on their own.

Teacher Syombua who also taught at Kapana High School and believed in empowering students used a similar approach. She told students to write notes and then she checked whether students had the facts by asking them closed-ended questions on the topic.

Unlike Teacher Hekima, she involved her class in presentations most of the time and rarely used question and answer method. She neither dictated notes nor wrote notes on the
board like Teacher Hekima. During my observations she used question and answer method to review key topic areas—areas where examination questions were likely to come from. This is illustrated in the field notes that follow.

Excerpt 2a: Teacher Syombua’s Class, September 15, 2009.

Teacher Syombua entered the room at 10.27 and immediately began the lesson. She asked students whether they had finished reading and writing notes on national integration, an assignment that was to be done during their August break. She then told them they had two more chapters left to complete the syllabus. She reminded them that they were supposed to read about factors promoting national integration and conflict resolution during the holidays. She then asked for the meaning of the word conflict. A student said it was a serious disagreement. She asked students if they had notes on steps of resolving conflicts, the main reasons for resolving conflicts and levels of conflict. She told the students to revise the topic thoroughly for exams. She then told them one of the likely questions on the exam would be what steps to be followed in resolving conflicts and then told them she would bring in more questions on the topic during the next lesson and then moved to the next topic, “Contact between East Africa and the Outside World.”

In my conversation with Teacher Syombua, she had articulated it was important to put emphasis on the topic on national integration because it would help to foster peace. This was a view that was shared by Teacher Hekima. When I asked them what topic or issues in Form 1 history and government syllabus needed to be emphasized, they gave the following response:

**Teacher Hekima:** Actually all the topics are important, but …um topics like citizenship and national integration you will not leave them to the students to do them on their own. You want to be there with them; go through the topic with them.

**Teacher Syombua:** National integration and cohesion because this is a national issue considering the violence that was there in 2007, so that one really needs to be emphasized as soon as possible to get the solutions.
However, Teacher Syombua’s lesson on this topic was a short one, and she only told students to read the sections where examination questions were likely to come from. The importance of passing examinations was further highlighted when Teacher Syombua introduced the next topic. Her teacher talk emphasized areas students needed to pay attention to. The excerpt below illustrates this:


Teacher Syombua wrote on the board, “Contact between East Africa and the Outside World” and then turned to look at the students.

Teacher Syombua: Read and make notes on the chapter. Include the sources of information. Who were the first people to visit East Africa?

S: [choral answer] Portuguese

T: Which are the sources of information?

S: [Choral answer] written sources, electronic sources

T: Acheni Kuimba [Stop singing the answers] Which people were living in the coast? Have you ever been to the coast?

S: [no answer]

T: When you write about the early visitors, include the sources. Who were the early visitors?

S: [Unclear choral answer]

T: You can be asked in the exam why the visitors came to East Africa. Write the evidence that shows early visitors really visited East Africa. Write also about the communities that were there when visitors came. What trade took place between the visitors and the communities? Write about the long distance traders and the short distance trade. Specifically write about the factors that led to the trade. I hope you are capturing the points that can be asked in the exam. Which community was involved in the long distance trade?

S: [choral answer] Akamba

T: The Akamba were the community involved because they came from a dry area and they walked long distances. Write why the Portuguese visited the coast, their administration at the coast, the decline of the Portuguese rate and their
overthrow by the Arabs. Make sure you write six points for each. Also write about the Arabs and Seyyid Said. Do not forget the introduction of plantation farming. This is another common question you can be asked: Why did Seyyid Said change his capital from Oman to Zanzibar? Include that when you are writing your notes. The last part of the topic is the spread of Christianity in Kenya. Here you are going to write about the mission societies, which ones?

S: [Choral answer] Church missionaries. Also write about the missionaries such as Kraft. You can be asked about the contributions of the missionaries. What contributions did Kraft bring?

S: [Choral answer] Answers are inaudible.

T: Write about the problems faced by missionaries in East Africa. You also did this in primary school. What are some of these problems?

S: [Choral answers]. Diseases, language barrier, navigation difficulties

T: Then you are going to conclude. How much time do you need to write the notes?

S: [students give different suggestions]

T: I will check the notes after two weeks then discussions will start. Kazi ianze saa hii [start working right now]. Do not rewrite the textbook. [Students who did not have textbooks moved to share with those who had. Then the teacher sat at the back and observed students from there. Shortly, the bell rang]

T: Remember you have only two weeks to write these notes in class.

Teacher Syombua’s teaching approach here illuminates the complexities experienced by teachers in many African schools (American Institutes for Research (AIR) & Ginsburg, 2006). One of those complexities is trying to balance between using democratic, child-centred approaches and preparing students for examinations. This complexity was observed in case studies conducted in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda by Hopkins (2002) (as cited in AIR & Ginsburg, 2006). Studies revealed that even where teachers had been trained to use child-centred approaches, teachers usually reverted to teacher-centred approaches because they felt pressurized to cover the curriculum in preparation for examinations (Capper et al., 2002 cited in AIR & Ginsburg, 2006). Likewise, Teacher Syombua’s approach here
emphasized the need for students to commit to memory facts that would be asked on the examination. Although she had mentioned that a good citizen was one who was able to participate actively in a democracy, there was little evidence that her teaching approach was preparing students towards that end. Like many other educators, she was caught up in a dilemma of empowering students by allowing them to express their own views on the one hand, and on the other hand, strictly following the syllabus in order to have it covered by the end of the year.

Out of all the teachers, she alone had said she had no problems covering the syllabus because “by strictly following the syllabus we are able to cover the required content as per the examining body, the Kenya National Examination Council.” Teacher Syombua’s major concern was to cover the content that would help students pass examinations, and this may explain why she shaped the curriculum the way she did. As already mentioned standardized testing exerts pressure on teachers and influences the way they enact the curriculum (Arthur, 2001; Wane & Gathenya, 2004).

To empower her students, Teacher Syombua explained she used a “learner-centred” approach which included incorporating group presentations into her teaching. Such presentations were already in progress and out of twelve groups seven had already done their presentations. Teacher Syombua explained that she had given students the autonomy to choose the people they wanted to work with and each group had been assigned a section of the topic, “Social, Economic and Political Organization of Kenyan Societies in the 19th Century.” They had also been given time to prepare. Students were to evaluate the performance of each group after all the presentations had been completed. Below are field notes taken during one of the presentations.
The teacher entered the room and then asked which group was doing their presentation. Four girls went to the front. Their presentation was on the social, economic and political organization of the Abagusii. One girl picked a piece of chalk to write what the presenter said. The other two girls stood beside the presenter waiting for their turn. The first girl who was hardly audible introduced what the group was going to present. Once this was done, another girl took over. She said she was going to talk about the social organization of the Abagusii. She was visibly nervous and the class could hardly hear her. The teacher asked her to speak louder. Meanwhile the girl who was at the board was writing as the girl talked. She wrote:

**Social organization**

- circumcision of both boys and girls, initiated boys formed age sets and they were ready to marry
- believed in their God and they directed prayers to the sun.
- believed in ancestral spirits who acted as their mediators

The presenter was no longer audible. The class asked her to repeat but she did not. Since the girl who was writing on the board could hear her, she went on writing. She wrote:

- diviners offered sacrifices to the spirits.
- diviners interpreted God’s messages.

The girl moved to the side and another girl got ready to present. Before she started, the teacher told the class not to ask questions until the end of presentations. The presenter said she was going to talk about the economic organization of the Abagusii and another girl was now writing the key points on the board. The presenter read points from her book without giving any eye contact. Meanwhile the girl at the board was busy writing down the points:

- hunting
- agriculture
- used tools
- kept livestock’s
- grew millet, sorghum
- were iron workers made spears, arrows and knives
- traded with other neighbors (barter trade).

She finished her presentation. The last presenter stepped forth to continue with the presentation. The girl was loud and clear. She announced she was going to talk about the political organization of the Abagusii and then said a chief who was called Omugambi headed the clan. She also said they had a council of elders. She added that boys became warriors after they had military training. She
added that warriors protected their cattle from raids by the Maasai. After the girl had finished her presentation, a student asked what the role of the youth was. One of the presenters said it was to marry. No one challenged her answer. More students raised their hands to ask questions. A student asked what their place of worship was. The presenters had no answer and the teacher told them to do research and answer the question during the next lesson. The bell rang. The teacher, who all along sat at the back of the class, told the presenters to look for more points on the role the council of elders, and then commended their good use of the chalkboard.

This excerpt is a typical example of how group presentations were conducted by Kapana High School teachers. Students chose their group leaders whose work was to coordinate the presentation and to summarize their presentation once every presentation had been done. The teacher did not intervene unless she deemed it necessary. For the most part, she facilitated the presentations and students enjoyed some autonomy. As the students expressed during the interviews, the fact that they were able to speak in front of everyone was a significant milestone for them. Given that citizenship education includes helping students to participate fully in public debates and discussions, enhancing students’ communication skills is crucial (Peterson, 1994). This is a fact that students were well aware of. In the conversations held with students, many had expressed they “enjoyed presentations because they make one to be courageous, develop English skills. You see, one cannot use Kiswahili. You just develop your language slowly. And makes one to know how to express himself or herself.”

Nevertheless, from a critical point of view, the presentations fell short of promoting the kind of democratic citizenship envisioned in the official curriculum, which included preparing students to become active citizens. The presentations were not very different from the question and answer method in the sense that students memorized—or tried to memorize—facts from textbooks and recited them to the rest of the students. This recitation
suggests the importance of the ability to recite the facts which are necessary to know for examination purposes (AIR& Ginsburg, 2006). Like the question and answer technique, students remained “passive” because the presentations did little to stimulate students’ intellect.

For Teacher Hekima and Teacher Syombua, however, they believed that they supported a climate in which students were empowered by using questions and presentations to allow students’ maximum participation. To them, allowing students to express themselves freely through answering questions and presentations translated into democratic practices. This view concurs with findings from a study done by Dull (2004) in Ghana that suggests teachers’ conceptualized democratic practices as giving students opportunities to speak as they answered teachers’ questions, even when those questions did not lead to critical thinking.

Unlike in earlier studies where classroom atmosphere was reported as repressive and intimidating (Dunne, 2007; Harber, 2002; Sifuna, 2000), neither of the teachers used harsh language, reprimanded or punished students for violating social norms while they were being observed. However, because recitation of historical facts inhibited the development of students’ expressive capacities (Rowell & Prophet, 1990), it would impede their development as active, successful citizens. According to Dejaeghere and Tudball (2007), successful citizens are politically well informed and show a readiness for political participation.

**Pedagogical strategies: Lango teachers.**

Unlike Kapana High School teachers, Lango teachers used a more traditional approach to teaching. They did not give any group work or presentation assignments. Most of the time teachers would review the previous lesson by asking questions, begin the lesson for
the day by explaining or asking questions and then they would dictate notes, amid reprimands. Unlike Kapana teachers, teachers at Lango did not require students to write notes on whole chapters. Most of the notes were dictated by the teacher. Unlike the teachers at Kapana High School, teachers at Lango High School often asked students if they had any questions. However, rarely did students ask questions. This finding concurs with findings of an earlier study by Fuller and Snyder (1991) which suggests that students rarely asked questions of their own. Even when students ask questions, they only do so if they want the teacher to clarify a point. The excerpt below illustrates how Teacher Katungwa conducted her lessons.

**Excerpt 4: Teacher Katungwa’s Class, September 24, 2009.**

The teacher entered the classroom and told students if they reported late, they would be sent back home. She reminded them they should arrive at 7 a.m and added that if student had a problem, the parent should come to school to explain. She further explained to the students that staying away from school or going to school late made them fail. She complained that it was shameful their performance was the lowest among the four streams and advised students to take their studies more seriously. She then began the lesson.

T: Where did we stop last time?

S: [Choral answer] Reasons for the Bantu migration.

T: We are too behind. You will be writing notes on your own. [She then wrote on the board Nilotic Speakers and started to dictate notes]. The term Nilotes is derived from the word “Nile.” This refers to the groups of people whose origin is associated with river Nile. [She then turned to one student and said] “Kasivu I am expecting you to be writing notes. Are you writing or not? Where does river Nile begin?

S: A girl answered Lake Victoria

T: Where does it end?

S: Mediterranean Sea.

T: How many countries does it pass through?
S: [inaudible choral answer]

T: [she continued with the dictation] The Nilotic speakers point to the Nile valley in southern Sudan as their place of origin. They are divided into three groups based on where they settled. Which are these groups?

S: [Choral answer]

T: Give the names of the groups.

S: [unclear choral answers]

T: Write down the names. [Some students did not get the names so they copied from the students sitting next to them]. Which groups form the Kalenjin.

S: Pokot, Turgen, Kipsigis, Marakwet, Sabaot.

T: Where do the Sabaot live? [She quickly answered the question herself]. They live along Mount Elgon. [She then wrote on the board “The Luo”] The Luo are believed to have come from Ghazal. Do the Sudanese have any resemblance with the Luo?

S: [Excitedly]. They are tall, they are dark [All eyes were now on one of the darker students].

T: Who are you looking at? [laughter from students]. They moved to Pubungo Pakwach in Uganda where they settled by 1450s AD and they later moved to Kenya. She then wrote: Reasons for the Luo migration. Write this they were in search of fresh grazing land and water for their animals. What were the economic activities of the Luo

S: [Choral answer] Fishing.

T: Other reasons for Luo migration

S: Drought and famine forced them to move in search of food.

S: Class and family feuds [the teacher wrote the word “feuds” on the boards]

S: Population pressure at their original homeland.

T: What is the meaning of population pressure? [She did not wait for an explanation. she explained].

S: They escaped external attacks

S: Disease and epidemic afflicted the people and animals forcing them to migrate.
S: The spirit of adventure.

S: They moved in search of better fishing areas.

T: The next sub-topic is Luo, migration and settlement. Write this: The Luo had begun to move to the present day Kenya by fifteenth. They moved in four groups. [She stopped to explain that the textbook had four groups but there were actually three groups. They moved to Ramogi Hills. [She writes the word Ramogi on the board]. The four groups are Jok Ajok. These things you learn in primary so can you write them down. [She proceeded to write Jok Owiny, jok omollo and Luo abasuba on the board]. Let’s look at the first one. No, I don’t think I will give you notes on this one. I am spoon feeding you. Leave a whole page so that you can write the notes later. Write about the movements of each group. Do not photocopy the textbook. Write this: The effects of the Luo migration. What were the effects? [Hands went up]

S: Population increase

S: Displacement

S: Intermarriage

S: Exchange of culture

T: Nawewe wacha kukaa kama boss! [You, don’t sit like a boss!].

S: Conflict between newcomers and original settlers.

S: Exchange of knowledge.

T: I am now going to dictate notes on these effects. [dictation and exposition of some points]. When people are displaced people fight. The Luo displaced the Abaluhya, Abagusii and the Abakuria. They absorbed some communities e.g. the Abaluhya. What is to absorb? I told you last time.

S: Attraction

T: What is to absorb? When we eat food, the food is absorbed by the body, what is the meaning?

S: To disappear

T: They exchanged the tools they did not have; they intermarried, they adopted agriculture because of the interaction with the Bantus. [She then wrote on the board]. The plain Nilotes [dictation]. They include the Maasai, the Teso, Turkana, and the Njemps. Where do these people live? Ama hamjawai kusikia mambo ya hawa watu? (or you have never heard anything about these people?) No answer. Njemps live around LakeBaringo. The Samburu is the last group.
Write this: The Maasai and Samburu are sometimes referred to as the maa speakers because they speak the same language. Do we have a Maasai in the class? What about a Samburu? No answer. The plain Nilotes entered East Africa in from an area north of Lake Turkana. They were nomadic pastoralists. [The bell rang and then she wrote on the chalkboard: Reasons for Migration of the Plain Nilotes]. Write notes on this and I will check during the next class.

Teacher Katungwa’s lesson is another illustration of a recital session where students repeated historical facts they have read and memorized. Her mention of how “shameful” it was that the class was ranked last in relation to examination performance underscores the enormous pressure that examinations exert on teachers (Fuller & Snyder, 1991; Rowell, 1995; Wane & Gathenya, 2004). This teacher was aware that she was just transmitting information to the students and she portrayed the passive nature of her students when she told them that she was not going to “spoon-feed” them anymore. Clearly, the teacher was conscious of more “positive” teaching practices and understood the value of students’ active participation. However, she seemed caught up between allowing students to actively participate in the learning process and transmitting all the necessary information students needed to pass examinations. As Freire (1993) points out, “banking education” elevates the teacher to the position of “the all-knowing” from whom all knowledge comes. It was not surprising, therefore, when a student commented “I would like to listen to the teacher talking because if you don’t listen it might come in the exam and you won’t get the correct answer.”

Even though students were portrayed as passive, they were in fact constantly and actively involved in making choices in order to survive in the competitive environment created by high stakes examinations.

In an interview with Teacher Katungwa, she had mentioned that she used teaching methods that were “not friendly” because she needed to cover the content to help students
perform well on examinations. Her explanation was congruent with her teaching practices. For Teacher Katungwa, there was no better way to get the syllabus covered without getting into trouble with the administration. She had called her teaching practices “survival tactics.” This highlights the complexities embedded in classroom realities that make it rather difficult for teachers to enact the curriculum any differently. They resort to “survival tactics” to either keep their jobs or to avoid reprimands.

This is a common practice for many teachers in many parts of the world. For example, Higgins, Miller, and Wegmann (2006) point out teachers in the United States feel pressured to teach to the test although they know it is not the best practice. In the same vein Rothstein (2008) adds that because of the accountability issues embedded in standardized testing, schooling in the United States has become corrupted. This is echoed by Odhiambo (2008) who argues that accountability in Kenya seems to focus on students’ achievement whereby teachers are held accountable for the results of their teaching. Consequently, this brings in complexities in the educational process because teachers seem to have no autonomy in planning their work (Odhiambo, 2008).

A body of literature also indicates that teachers do not only use authoritarian methods because they are pressurized to cover the syllabus. According to Odhiambo (2008), O’Sullivan (2004) and Tabulawa (1997), cultural factors that liken teacher-student relationship to adult-child relationship require students to listen and not to question authority of adults. Consequently, the climate in African classrooms is characterized by rigidity, unilateral teacher authority, fear, sarcasm, repression and intimidation designed to create passive and loyal students (Odhiambo, 2008, p. 418). In Teacher Katungwa’s case, it was not clear whether pressure from examinations or her cultural beliefs or both attributed to her
authoritarian methods of teaching. Writing about the educational dilemmas that face Kenyan teachers, Sifuna (1997) asserts that most educators in Kenya use repressive and authoritarian methods because that is how education has socialized them. Pre-service teacher education is authoritarian and as such, teachers learn to be authoritarian. Thus, like many teachers in Kenya, Teacher Katungwa seemed to adapt the curriculum to fit the cultural traditions of teaching practices in which she had been socialized. This was evident in the way she reprimanded students. For example, she expected students to sit in a certain way, so the statement “Nawewe wacha kukaa kama boss!” [You, don’t sit like a boss!] was to correct unacceptable behaviour. Occasionally, as the excerpt below demonstrates, Teacher Katungwa regulated students’ behaviour through punishments, which is a common practice in African schools (Dunne, 2007; Harber, 2002, 2004).

**Excerpt 5: Teacher Katungwa’s Class, July 10, 2009.**

The teacher walked into the classroom and looked around to see who was absent. Instead of beginning the lesson immediately like she usually did, she started telling the students about the importance of obeying teachers and prefects. She then read a list of names of students that would clean the classroom for making noise. She then advised students not to imitate the behaviour of students in the senior classes and added that the only business they had at the school was to learn.

Scholars such as Akyeampong and Stephens (2002), Dunne (2007), Harber (2002, 2004), Hardman, Abd-Kadir and Smith (2008), and Tabulawa (1997) assert that authoritarianism in African schools is largely attributed to the way African children and students are socialized. Thus, as children should obey their parents and adults in the community, so should students obey teachers and school rules. Reprimands and punishments are therefore perceived as normal.
Interestingly, Lango High School teachers seemed more authoritarian than Kapana High School teachers. One explanation may be drawn from the way Kapana High School principal had acknowledged that schools in Kenya were authoritarian. She had further explained that she tried to minimize authoritarianism by establishing channels through which students could express themselves. This suggests that she might have encouraged the teachers to be less authoritarian. One other explanation is that Lango High School teachers had received their teacher training at least 5 years earlier than Kapana High School teachers, suggesting that there might have been a shift from the more traditional approaches to teaching to less traditional ones. This explanation seemed to be supported by the constant use of the discourse of empowerment by Kapana High School teachers. Further evidence can be gleaned from the fact that Teacher Syombua had recently completed her master’s degree. Being the head of the humanities department, she might have encouraged teachers to use less traditional practices and to allow students some autonomy. If this is the case, then, teacher education colleges might not be as authoritarian as they used to be.

Observing Teacher Aminata, who also taught at Lango High School, revealed that students’ everyday realities were not included in the lesson. In what follows is a detailed account to demonstrate this.

*Excerpt 6: Teacher Aminata’s Class, July, 2009.*

The teacher entered the classroom and started to review the lesson previously taught. After which she began the day’s lesson.

T: Ways of improving food production in third world countries is our lesson today. How can the government improve food productions?" [She then wrote “lack of capital” on the board]. How can this problem be solved?

S: The government should give loans to the farmers.
T: Write down the points. [The teacher then wrote “poor transportation” on the board. Students put up their hands]

S: Roads should be improved.

T: [The teacher elaborated on this point and then she dictated what students should write. Then she wrote “poor tools for farming”]. What should the governments do?

S: [A student gave an answer which the teacher said was incorrect]

S: Tools should be improved. [Wrong answer]

T: Cooperatives can be formed in order for the farmers to be able to buy machinery. This is encouraged by the government. Write the point down. [Then she wrote “political instability”]. When there is political instability, there is no peace. What should the government do?

S: The government should promote peace.

T: What should be done to promote peace and get rid of tribalism?

S: People should intermarry.

T: You see these ethnic clashes. People are fighting and killing one another. The government should promote peaceful co-existence among communities so that they are able to farm. Write this down. [She didn’t explain how peace could be promoted]. How can you resolve conflicts?

S: Through negotiation.

T: The government should use diplomacy. [The “how” was not addressed]. The government could also improve food production by developing research stations where high-yielding crops and animals can be researched on. Developing countries should not rely on donor countries. Do you have any questions?

S: How can we tell the government to improve food production?

T: One can talk to the MP about these ideas

S: What if the dialogue fails, what can be done?

T: The country can get help from the UN and as Christians and Muslims; you can pray [only two religious groups were mentioned]

T: Effects of food shortage. What are the effects? [Hands went up]

S: Food shortage can lead to death.
S: Crime. [The teacher then explained how hunger could drive people into committing crimes].

S: People also migrate.

S: Food shortages can lead to diseases.

T: What kinds of diseases are caused by food shortage?

S: [Choral answer] Kwashiorkor.

S: Anemia

T: Stunted growth.

The bell rang and the teacher dismissed the class.

This lesson is one that clearly involves social justice issues related to political experiences. It is a lesson that involves issues of political instability, crime and disease. These issues are part of the students’ lived experiences and therefore very relevant issues to discuss. When the teacher asked students how peace could be promoted, except for one suggestion (intermarriage), no other ideas came forth. The teacher’s explanation was that the government should promote peace among ethnic groups, so she, like the students, did not suggest ways that peace could be promoted. Also, when a student asked how one could communicate to the government, it was the teacher who gave the response that one could talk to the MP. The student demonstrated the desire for political participation and his question provided an opportunity for students to give their views on how they could reach the government. When another student asked what should happen if using dialogue failed to resolve a conflict, the teacher answered the student’s question by telling her that people could pray or ask the United Nations to help. Students did not get an opportunity to express their views on the two questions asked. Gentles (2003) explains that when this happens, students
may view the teacher as the expert with legitimate answers and they may feel inhibited to express their own views.

In short, the lesson had current issues such as crime and diseases that students could relate to. Although the issues were mentioned in class, they were not, like in the student textbook, problematized as issues resulting from social injustices. Noting that curricula in many schools were at odds with the needs of the learners, Nieto (1996) contends that curriculum content should be relevant to the lives and life-styles of students. This suggests that by problematizing issues such as crime and disease, teachers would play an important role in subverting educational mechanisms through which oppressive and unjust structures are nourished and sustained. As such, a critical examination of the issues in the above lesson could help students to understand the socio-economic conditions in which they live and the factors that create the conditions, thereby fostering students’ political consciousness.

It would be unfair to conclude Teacher Aminata was not a good and caring teacher. She was. In fact, although she acknowledged the importance of helping students pass examinations, her vision was greater than that. She had explained in an interview that:

    I want to teach my students that they are the ones who should make the society become a better place…I want to make them think critically what they should do as grown-ups; that when you grow up you need to serve your community. Apart from passing exam, my essence is to make these students, prepare them so that they can become mature people in the way they reason, the way they relate to one another and to make them responsible.

Here was a teacher who believed her mission was to produce citizens who could be agents of change, yet in the process of doing so was helping in producing docile citizens. Lack of training or lack of teacher professional development pertaining to teaching critical civic
education might have been a contributing factor, not just for Teacher Aminata but for the rest of the teachers.

In my conversations with the teachers they had all said they incorporated discussions in their teaching. However, findings suggested that what they perceived as discussions was actually the question-and-answer method they routinely employed. None of the teachers perceived discussions as a process of exchanging ideas or deliberating on issues where students weighed their views against the views of others to arrive at a well-thought-out conclusion. This art of deliberation is explained by Parker (1997) as including:

many facets of joint problem solving—listening as well as talking, grasping others’ points of view, and using common space to forge positions with others, rather than using it only as a platform for expressing opinions. (p. 21)

The four teachers’ pedagogical practices for the most part reflected the transmission orientation where bodies of information and codified facts are viewed as true knowledge that requires no inquiry or discussion. Such practices are authoritarian because they stifle students’ voice. According to Bridges (1988), it is important to encourage open discussion in the classroom and to teach them the skills of deliberation so as to reach “the fullest and most sound understanding.” He points out that

It seems to me that a preference for group discussion over…the authoritative lecture in teaching, and a preference for democratic deliberation over authoritative decision in the political context can both be rooted in a common epistemological skepticism and, more positively, in the same opinion that the fullest and most sound understanding is the product of group processes (pooling of information, exchange of perspectives…and mutual negotiation) rather than, or at least in addition to individual judgment. (p. 125)

**Conclusion**

Findings from the observations revealed that the four teachers deeply cared about their students and they did their work to the best of their ability and knowledge. However,
classes remained authoritarian in the sense that teacher talk dominated the lessons and students only talked when called upon to answer questions. In addition, there was no room for students to give their own opinions because all the teaching involved giving historical facts. Although two teachers used group presentations to promote students’ voice in the classroom, for the most part, activities that would involve critical thinking and interactions were absent from the four classes observed. Most teachers seemed to be in a rush to cover the syllabus. However, to ascertain that students had memorized all the facts, they asked questions based on the lessons previously taught. Although this made the lessons seem rather repetitive and did not encourage critical thinking, students seemed to remember the facts they needed for the purposes of passing examinations.

Classroom activities that would trigger discussions that foster critical thinking skills are key elements in creating a democratic community. If students are to be politically engaged, classroom instruction should foster civic and political knowledge; civic and political skills and political participation (Avery, 2007). This is summed up in the words of Apple and Beane (1995) who point out that,

A democratic curriculum invites young people to shed the passive role of knowledge consumer and assume the active role of “meaning-makers.” It recognizes that people acquire knowledge by both studying external sources and engaging in complex activities that require them to construct their own knowledge. (p. 16)

As already explained, for the four teachers, it seemed quite difficult to enact the curriculum any other way than they did because of the complexities surrounding their professional lives. These complexities are discussed in more detail in the chapter that follows.
Chapter Seven:
Pedagogical Challenges and Possibilities

Introduction

If I had painted portraits of Kapana High School and Lango High School based on my first impressions of the two schools, I would have painted portraits with beautiful buildings, neat flower beds, neatly-clad students and warm, friendly staff. I would have painted portraits of schools without challenges. It was not until I got to talk to the administration, interacted with teachers and students and observed classroom teaching practices that I gained insight into the challenges that lay therein.

Pedagogical Challenges

In my conversation with the curriculum developer, he explained that the goals of teaching history and government which included promoting the kind of citizenship that would foster peace were only partially achieved. He put the level of achievement of civic education goals at 50%, although he was quick to add he had not done any scientific study.

To the curriculum developer, the objective of the history and government course was to foster a very cohesive society and to produce “good” citizens, but he explained that indicators of cohesiveness and good citizenship proved otherwise. For example, he argued that the course had failed because students’ attitudes toward their country did not demonstrate any sense of patriotism after they completed their secondary education. He further noted that there was too much corruption in the country and that if people were patriotic they would not amass so much wealth without giving much thought to other citizens. The curriculum developer explained it was difficult for the goals of civic education
to be realized because of the challenges that civic education teachers faced, most of which he attributed to curriculum development. These challenges, which also emerged in the conversations with other participants, are enumerated as follows:

**Invalidation of the history and government course.**

One of the major challenges mentioned was the legitimization of science and mathematics by the government, which had negatively influenced students’ and society’s attitude towards history and government. While many students lacked interest in the subject, some decided to drop it altogether. The curriculum developer explained:

> What I would suggest is um you know in the past—I should say 1986 because that is where the 8-4-4 cycle started—history and government was a compulsory subject…so after a while, it was dropped from the list of compulsory subjects. Now as we speak it is one of the elective subjects… Many schools though still offer it at Form 1 and Form 2 levels. But at Form 3, a student can drop history and not sit for an exam in Form 4… And there are other schools that don’t even offer it in Form 1 and 2 to certain students… if history was made a compulsory subject, then it would be treated much more seriously than it is now. And one other thing, you know over the last few years—20 or something—there has been a lot of emphasis on science subjects and it is believed that if you are doing a science-related course, it is considered much more marketable, much more competitive in the market than the humanities particularly history and maybe other human-related subjects. It would be very important for our policy or education managers and policy makers to shift from umm kind of talking about the importance of science all the time and not mentioning subjects like history. That would make it very important and then people would be very interested.

This is not an isolated case. In many parts of the world, civic education is not viewed as a subject that would give an advantage of entry into the job market or into higher
institutions of education. Reporting on different case studies regarding the situation of civic education in schools in different countries, Schwille and Amadeo (2002) note:

> civic education is little involved in the credentialing and selection process that so largely determines what happens in school and what people think is important about what happens. We do not see the case studies instances of civic education being sought after by students as an important means of enhancing their occupational prospects and social status. Nor does it generally figure prominently among the high-stakes examinations that students must pass in order to advance to and through the more selective, elite and prestigious parts of educational systems. (p. 112)

Further evidence of such devaluation was pointed out by Kapana principal. She explained that the government, through the ministry of education, legitimized some subjects while it devalued subjects like history and government. She illustrated this point further by explaining that mathematics and science teachers had to take a mandatory program to improve the teaching of these subjects in schools. Had there been a similar program for history teachers, perhaps they might have devised ways of dealing with pedagogical challenges. In Kapana principal’s view, this failure to pay attention to all subjects was an indication that the government legitimized some subjects while it devalued others:

> The Kenyan curriculum is so much oriented to sciences and math. We have a program that is very much established in Japan and Kenya called SMSSE. Basically it is means Strengthening Mathematics and Sciences in Secondary Education. So this one is so established and every teacher has to go through the 4 cycles and the 4 cycles take 4 years… At one point they said that you will not teach sciences unless you go through this program, so in fact we went through it….But what I am trying to say is, we don’t have a similar program for these other subjects…Generally, I wouldn’t want to say that there are subjects that are better than others….At one point actually—in the ministry—the science teacher used to be paid more than the humanities teacher and I
think that one brought a lot of acrimony or conflict and we had a situation whereby now the government did not have enough humanities teachers.

Kapana principal was concerned that this devaluation of history would lead to the production of citizens who would be social misfits. She lamented:

I look at history and whatever they learn in history, it is so, so important. I think if you only brought them mathematics, then these students will just come out as people who can only do calculations but they cannot fit in the society.

A similar concern was raised by Lango principal who felt that by discouraging students to take history, the government had failed in its role of moulding the leaders of tomorrow. Her disappointment in the government was evident in her remarks:

I think our children are getting a raw deal somewhere because we need to mould leaders here, but we are creating academicians. These are purely academicians—because we want you to pass in mathematics, English and Kiswahili, a science—chemistry, biology, or physics, one of them. The idea is to pass exams, but we are not moulding leaders in our society. We are not… it was the government policy at one time around the year 2000 there where the emphasis was we want to get industrialized as a country and therefore the teaching of sciences. Actually it was science and science and science … the government wanted scientists, but they forgot we need leaders, we need administrators. We need human beings who are really taking the issues of human life. They forgot history, they forgot CRE—they forgot all those.

Lango principal’s remarks illuminate the short-sightedness of a government that fails to acknowledge the vital role of history—of moulding politically active citizens ready to grapple with social issues. Her further remarks in the excerpt below suggest the kind of
students one might find in a history class—disengaged students who “feel like a nobody” because of taking a “lukewarm” subject. She noted:

Yes, because even university intake was science. They were not taking history, geography…lecturers were retrenched. No jobs… And then students were made to feel when they were doing sciences it is when you are somebody very important. When you are taking history or what some parents would even refer to as lukewarm subjects, you feel like a nobody…to everybody these are lukewarm subjects. And that is how they killed that area. Now to get a teacher—in fact Teachers’ Service Commission is now saying unless we train, they have to go back to training now; they are not there, especially history [teachers].

Earlier in the interview I had asked Lango principal where she would rank history in relation to other subjects, and she had ranked it in the fifth place out of seven or eight subjects. Her response was in total contrast with that of Kapana principal who had said all subjects were important and it was not possible to rank them. According to Lango principal, however, Languages, mathematics and science subjects were more important than subjects such as history and government. In fact, she seemed glad that the government had already legitimized these subjects. Here she seemed to be in total agreement with the government:

So far the government is doing exactly that; and particularly languages—a lot of emphasis should be put on languages because language is changing every day. They need to have a lot of time on languages. And things like mathematics. We have to put a lot of emphasis on science, I think there is no problem teaching science.

As Lango principal explained which languages she was referring to, she explained that languages play a key role in fostering national cohesion:
We are talking about English and Kiswahili. These are the common languages in the country and in fact we should discourage mother-tongue, because that is what is making tribalism very bad in this country. Students should not use their mother-tongue. Even the teachers themselves—I keep talking to them and if they want to talk mother-tongue, it is not good. We should emphasize on the two official languages.

Contrary to Lango principal’s standpoint, Kapana principal attached the importance of teaching English eight lessons a week to the fact that English was the medium of instruction and students needed to learn to communicate in English in order to perform well at school.

When Lango principal emphasized the need to discourage the use of indigenous languages or mother tongue, she was not just voicing her own opinion, but the opinion of political leaders who believe that national cohesion can be promoted through common and “neutral” languages. The fact that most African states have over 20 languages makes it difficult to decide which indigenous language should become the official language without making the speakers of other languages to feel marginalized. Kenya, for example, has about 40 languages. To promote national unity, African nations found themselves turning to ex-colonial languages since they were thought to be neutral. Although this was meant to unite people and to foster social justice, the paradox is that the use of foreign languages as official languages and as the media of instruction has created a socio-economic and political divide. Indeed, the use of English in Kenyan schools is a powerful tool of social stratification; a tool that is jealously guarded by the privileged who already possess it. Its use in Kenyan schools makes it rather difficult for children from poor families and those who live in the rural areas to do well in school given that they have limited access to English. For instance, it is difficult
for students to access books written in English. In some cases, only the teacher has a textbook and in less desperate cases one textbook is shared by more than three students. The poor schools in the villages do not have class readers or libraries from where students can borrow books. In addition, most villages do not have electricity, so electronic media remains unavailable, even to those very few who can afford to do so. Therefore, it becomes difficult for students from poor backgrounds and those from rural areas to perform well on their national examinations that are written in English. This concurs with the findings of a study carried out by Bunyi (1999) that revealed English as a medium of instruction has led to differential educational treatment. She points out that teachers in rural areas repeated one concept over and over while in the urban areas, although teachers did not use learner-centred approach, they exposed students to subject matter of a higher level than that of the rural children in the same grade. Thus, the use of English perpetuates social injustices because it does not promote equality of opportunity but sabotages the life chances of many students.

Promotion of English and Kiswahili and the devaluation of indigenous languages contradict one the objectives of history and government, which is to appreciate and promote varied cultures of the Kenyan people. Furthermore, when children are discouraged from speaking their mother tongue, what is being affirmed is that their language is deficient (Cummins, 2001, p. 21). The devaluation of languages, especially African indigenous languages has directly placed African cultures in an inferior position. Language is the vehicle of culture, so when a language dies, so does the culture. Consequently, pushing African languages to the margins is tantamount to pushing African cultures to the margins. In Kenya, for example, urban children are alienated from their cultures because they have adopted English and Kiswahili and abandoned their mother tongues. As a result, these children miss
the opportunity to learn community values which are passed down from one generation to another through word of mouth. Putting emphasis on English raises several questions: How can history and government help students to appreciate the cultures of Kenyan people, including their own, if educators promote cultural invasion by advocating the use foreign languages? How can history and government help students develop cultural pride if educators continually alienate students from their own culture and from themselves (Freire, 1993) by devaluing their languages? And how can educators not emphasize the teaching of English that students need in order to pass their national examinations? This is one of the paradoxes that highlight the contradictory role assumed by education in general, and civic education in particular.

In my view, speaking a national or an official language alone cannot promote social cohesion in Kenya or in Africa in general; it is difficult to eradicate disunity when discrimination, poverty, marginalization and powerlessness exist in society. People will always identify themselves along kinship or ethnic lines especially when they feel vulnerable. This is well explained by Ekeh (2004) who observed that “kinship has mushroomed into an elaborate network of relationships in which the individual has, nevertheless, a clear identity and from which he expects his basic security needs to be met” (p. 31). Thus, while it is important to promote national unity through a national language, it is also important to acknowledge the multiple identities in relation to, for example, class, race, sexual orientation, disability and gender.

Syllabus coverage.

Although Lango principal’s standpoint seems to invalidate history and government and other social science courses, it points to the many tensions and contradictions educators
face, one of which is syllabus coverage. A headline by Wairimu and Matum (2008) in People Daily, a leading newspaper in Kenya, read as follows: “School Riots: Uncovered Syllabus Blamed” (p. 24). Nothing would have been more telling about the challenge of completing the syllabus than this headline.

One of the consequences of legitimizing science, mathematics and languages (particularly English) was that subjects such as history were allotted less lessons on the timetable, making it difficult for teachers to cover the syllabus. Three participants from Lango High School expressed concern that some of the strategies used in an effort to cover the syllabus compromised students’ learning. What follows are some of the concerns they expressed:

**Lango principal:** …I think emphasis should be put in history, where children can learn the history about this country…and then put more time—because why put all the time in mathematics and English and Kiswahili then we don’t put emphasis on history for our children? Like Kiswahili is being taught 5 times in Form one. So every day there is Kiswahili and every day there is English. When you get to Form 3 and 4, there are so many lessons, 8 lessons, mathematics the same. But when it comes to history it is only 4. So you find that covering the syllabus is not possible. Teachers have to rush over history. Every year they are rushing to cover the syllabus... Every time the teacher is trying to cover the topics, giving work, and then she is through, but I don’t think this is proper. History teachers teach at night in boarding school. But in day schools they don’t have that option, so the subject history and geography they suffer a lot.

**Teacher Aminata:** Actually we don’t cover the syllabus well due to the fact that this is a day school. What I do to cover the syllabus, although I don’t cover it well, I make sure I give some work in areas where I find the topics are not difficult. They write notes…I mean you find that there is no one time I
have completed form 1 syllabus. At least a topic remains, which I cover in the beginning of the following year when they are in form 2.

**Teacher Katungwa:** By the end of the day we are rushing to finish the syllabus. At times the administrators are hard on us. They ask, “Where are you in the syllabus? Have you covered the syllabus because you need to go to form 2 when you are through with the form 1? What are your ways of trying to ensure you are through with the form 1 syllabus?” And if you are seen you are carrying work forward to Form 2, then you are told you are not working and you can be harassed by the administrators. So what happens is that when you realize that you are behind, you have to look for extra time. For example you can go there in the morning, 7 to 8. You give yourself an hour. Those are called survival tactics. After 4.00 you can tell them to wait and you can also use other methods that are not friendly like giving them notes to write and they read. You give them a whole topic and then just summarize.

These remarks not only demonstrate the harsh realities of history teachers’ professional lives, but they also demonstrate the impact these realities had on students. As Teacher Katungwa explained, accountability issues forced teachers to resort to coping strategies that were “not friendly.” For this teacher, learning was secondary to syllabus coverage. She explained:

> I think you have realized in this school we try to give them notes because we know if we give them that leeway, make your own notes, they can easily photocopy the textbook because they cannot read and try to get the points. So by the end of the day you are the one to lose because they will not have notes, they will not have anything to revise. Maybe I will have covered the syllabus, but in the real sense I will not have covered the syllabus [laughter] because learners have nothing. They have not gained anything at all.

The picture painted by Teacher Katungwa confirmed what one of her students had earlier remarked. The student had noted that copying notes from textbooks was a waste of “energy,
paper and ink” given that most students did not understand the notes or they did not have the skills to summarize notes from textbooks. These findings raise the question whether the goals of history and government were ever realized at Lango High School if what students did was to copy or write notes they could not understand.

At Kapana High School, educators had conflicting views regarding syllabus coverage. While Teacher Hekima felt that they needed more time to cover the syllabus adequately, Teacher Syombua reported that they had adequate time to cover the syllabus. Teacher Hekima seemed to experience similar challenges experienced by teachers at Lango High School. She explained:

Actually we feel like we need an extra class in the lower forms for us to be able to cover the syllabus comfortably. Actually we do. We actually rush over some stuff in order to cover the syllabus in the lower classes. Personally I ask students to write notes outside the class, so what we do in class is discussion. If they were to write notes during the lesson, we cannot cover the syllabus.

Like Teacher Aminata and Teacher Katungwa, she told students to read topics on their own and write notes which she would explain later in class. She however gave students notes on citizenship and national integration topics which she said, “You will not leave them to the students to do them on their own. You want to be there with them, go through the topics with them.”

Unlike other teachers, Teacher Syombua who was also the humanities head of department did not seem to have any challenges. I was curious to know the extent to which she struggled to cover the syllabus given that she had earlier mentioned she used learner-centred approach. Her response was that
In the beginning of the year we do what we call schemes of work what you will cover every week according to the syllabus, so we don’t go by the textbook, the publishers. We go by the syllabus. There is a lot in the textbook but the emphasis is on the syllabus. By strictly following the syllabus we are able to cover the required content as per the examining body, the Kenya National Examination Council. So the textbooks look so huge but we only cover what is in the syllabus.

Further contradictions emerged from the discussion with Kapana principal. According to her, teachers were able to cover the syllabus, but added that it was a challenge to cover Form 4 syllabus. This, she said, necessitated teachers to teach some topics and leave the rest to students to read on their own. However, from her response, it was clear she did not have concrete evidence whether the syllabus was covered or not:

They umm the teachers—according to the schemes and records of work—you know basically that is what I use (laughter)—the schemes and records of work— they are able to cover the syllabus. The class that may have problems is Form 4 because they want to finish early and revise, so I know some topics they don’t teach. They give students work to revise, to research. According to me it may not be a very good method…, but they say it works, which is all right.

Several inferences can be drawn from these findings. Owing to the fact that they rushed to cover the syllabus, teachers were not as effective as they would have liked to be. In fact, Teacher Katungwa described her teaching/coping strategies as ineffective by saying that “they (students) gain nothing.” This was largely contributed by the fact that students covered some topics on their own. Syllabus coverage was, seemingly, more important than creating time to allow students to grapple with real social issues which may impede peace and social
justice. This was evident in the remark made by teacher Syombua that teachers “went by the syllabus” which implied they did not (or rarely) weave in current controversial issues not prescribed in the curriculum. Besides, it seemed teachers worked under much pressure because they had to make sure they had covered the syllabus well for the high stakes national examinations. It also seemed that the teachers’ goal of teaching history and government was to help students pass their examinations be they end-of term, end-of year or Kenya national examinations. For the upper classes, teachers wanted to help students gain entry to institutions of higher learning or to improve their chances of passing by ensuring there was ample time for review. Furthermore, they had to work hard to cover the syllabus because their teaching was monitored and controlled through schemes and records of work, and as already noted, under such conditions, it would be difficult for teachers to incorporate social justice issues. Gérin-Lajoie (2008) expresses this when she points out it would be unfair to hold teachers accountable when the work they do is “mostly a result of top-down decisions, which do not give much room to the personnel to deviate from a rather prescriptive working environment” (p. 187). Indeed, many scholars empathize with educators. For example, in their chapter on teachers’ professional lives, Hargreaves and Goodson (1996) write:

To some extent, economic and policy forces are indeed pushing the life and work of the teacher in disturbing directions...These forces are also beginning to attack the professional lives of teachers through reduced resources...and restructuring of what teachers are expected to do. (p. 1)

The fact that teachers are not included in policy decision-making processes in Kenya, as in many countries in Africa (Coombe, 1997), largely contributed to their frustration. This was explicitly expressed by Lango principal:
but you see there is no forum where you can be consulted to give views. There are people who are deciding for us, some of them are not even teachers. I think the teachers are the best people to be asked about issues of education.

In Kenya, students’ examination outcomes are the yardstick by which teachers’ effectiveness is measured. Consequently, educators employ whatever strategies available to make sure the syllabus is covered. This makes examinations and syllabus coverage inseparable.

**Impact of examinations on teaching.**

In the conversations with educators, the issue of passing examinations emerged as a critical one. For example, when teachers were asked what their teaching philosophy was, most of their responses pointed to assisting students to pass their examinations. Teacher Katungwa, for example, explained her teaching philosophy as follows:

One, according to our curriculum and I can say education in Kenya, it is exam-centred. It is syllabus-oriented, so you are supposed to teach accordingly and teach very fast so that you cover the syllabus. And when I teach, when I go to class, I like teaching them to understand the facts… So I like teaching them and ensure that they understand. Normally we are rushing in the Kenyan education and syllabus and there are many topics. There are times we are forced to rush. But all in all I try my best to ensure they understand and pass their exams because that is the um…trend um…and produce results, otherwise…. [laughs].

These remarks seem to indicate that teachers transmit facts that students are supposed to reproduce on examinations. For this teacher, the essence of teaching history is to help students pass their exams.
Examination pressure was not only exerted on teachers. The principals also felt the pressure because schools were ranked according to their performance on national examinations. Wane and Gathenya (2004) note that the system is structured in such a way that schools strive to compete with other schools, often to the detriment of the health of the students, teachers and parents. Students spend hours trying to memorize information. It is therefore not surprising that Lango principal paid teachers extra money to teach on Saturdays in order to cover the syllabus.

The teachers try to make extra time on Saturdays—and that is what I have done—because I don’t want this syllabus not to be covered, the exam is being done by people who are not prepared so well, so we had to create time on Saturdays and teachers are willing to come. They come every Saturday from 8.00am to 1.00pm. It is an expense on the school, but I don’t mind. So that is a way of encouraging the teachers to cover the syllabus.

Like Lango principal, Kapana principal worked hard to produce good examination results. One of the strategies she used was to insist students take history because it involved rote memorization and therefore was not as difficult to pass as subjects like mathematics:

Like history you really have to read. You really have to read and memorize. But mathematics you don’t need to do anything. Math you can’t do rote memorization [laughter]. If you have not understood, you simply have not understood. You cannot try to remember this one we subtracted. It won’t take you anywhere. May be also that is another aspect by the way—that history depends on much of memory. You read and you memorize. It is in history that they have a lot of acronyms so that you can remember this, remember that. Science subjects you may not need that. You must understand and grasp the concept. But actually in history there is a lot of memorization. You have to memorize a lot. And I think because—now come to think of it—our education
system encourages rote learning, memorizing, drilling, you do it like now we are [in a loud whisper] drilling the Form 4s. We are drilling them [laugher] so that they get it. So because of that, this subject, history, requires basically that, so they do very well. But this other subjects—the sciences—don’t require that. They need you to understand the concept, so our students don’t do very well. But I can assure you, without even blinking my eyes [meaning butting an eye-lid], in the system we have a lot of rote learning, right from the primary level… So we are teaching them for the exam and they are passing, but we need that holistic outlook… We look at history as a subject that boosts our results and sometimes we insist all students take it, so that we can have very good results and everybody will be happy with us.

What is clear here is that history does not involve much critical thinking because all that the teachers need to do is to transmit historical facts which students memorize and reproduce later to demonstrate their knowledge. While Kapana principal encouraged her students to take history because it was an “easy” subject, some schools overlooked teaching history and concentrated on what they perceived as important subjects. As pointed out by the curriculum developer, this was illegal, but despite this, schools still did it:

There are those who don’t teach history. You know our country is so much examination and certificate oriented and there are schools that would want to start preparing their students for examinations right from Form 1. It is illegal, but umm they will put more emphasis on the subjects they think the students will do up to Form 4.

The importance of performing well on examinations was also articulated by students, and like their educators, they were more concerned about their performance on examinations rather than the knowledge that would help them make the society more peaceful and democratic:
Lazarus: I would like to listen to the teacher talking because if you don’t listen it might come in the exam and you won’t get the correct answer.

Melinda: Okay, you see in the classroom the teacher may dictate notes and write but when the exams come and then you read the notes, you won’t know about those things… You just read because it is a matter of reading to pass the exam.

Benjamin: I like history because it is easy to pass. It is not a hard subject like mathematics because you go through formulas that lead to difficult questions to answer. As in geography or history you go through it once and if you have kind of forgotten just a little and when you go through the other questions and come back to it you can remember what you have learnt.

Clearly, passing examinations and getting into good universities or colleges seemed to be regarded very highly in the Kenyan society, as elsewhere in developing countries, because it was thought to guarantee individuals socio-economic mobility (Stromquist, 2003; Vavrus, 2009). Education, in this case history, was not perceived as a tool that whets one’s critical thinking skills, a tool that could help individuals change their realities. Among all the educators, only Teacher Aminata pointed out passing examinations was just one part of learning. Her vision went beyond helping students to pass examinations. She believed that history should mould students into responsible critical thinkers who would initiate positive change in society.

As already mentioned, an overwhelming majority believed that passing examinations was the most important reason of studying history. This view is not uncommon, however. Studies indicate that many countries would rather concentrate on examinable subjects than teach civic education. A good illustration is presented by Burstein et al. (2006) who contend
that standardized testing impedes the teaching of civic education in California schools because teachers spend most of their time teaching subjects that are tested on standard measures. Writing about limitations of standardized testing, Samoff (2003a) notes that examinations rarely test learning as a process, information use (rather than acquisition), concept formation and development of analytic skills. He contends that important skills that would enhance social transformation are relegated to the margins. He notes: “Other expectations of the education system—for example, developing a common national identity, preparing young people for effective citizenship, nurturing cooperative skills, reducing social inequalities and resolving conflict—are included in quality measures even less often” (Samoff, 2003a, p. 75). This is unfortunate because when such issues are not assessed, this may send the message that such issues are not very important or relevant.

The emphasis that is put on standardized testing pressurizes educators to teach to the test. Thus, the findings are an indication that history and government does not help develop learners’ critical thinking skills, but rather makes them passive consumers of historical “facts.” To Samoff (2003b), given that national examinations shape curriculum, curriculum revolves around information to be transmitted rather than developing skills and tools that would help students acquire that information, generate ideas and craft critiques. Such learning based on this curriculum undermines students’ participation as active members of their societies because it does not promote values, attitudes and behaviours related to participation in a democracy (Dejaeghere & Tudball, 2007).

Language of instruction.

Although only one teacher expressed students’ inadequate English communication skills as a challenge, findings revealed it was a major challenge. Most of the students had
grown up in the city, but, understandably, they did not use English outside school and/or home when communicating with their siblings; they used a street slang called Sheng, a blend of Kiswahili, English and local languages. The students also used their home languages or mother tongues, which included Kalenjin, Kamba, Kikuyu, Kisii, Luhya, Luo and Oromo, to communicate with parents and adults. Three students did not speak any of the local languages because they were from other countries. However, they spoke Kiswahili and Sheng fluently and used their home languages to communicate with their parents. English was viewed as a language for the school setting only. It was not, therefore, surprising that a number of students viewed inadequate English skills as an impediment to their learning. For example, in her interview, Linda explained she preferred discussing history with her classmates because it was sometimes difficult to understand the teacher’s “high class language.” This lack of comprehension was also articulated by Bernard and Frank (in their interview), who felt that it was useless to copy notes that students could not even understand. It was also observed that some students found it difficult to express themselves in English during the interviews. For example, a student who struggled to explain to his group members he liked simulation as a class activity said, “I don’t know how I can describe it. The activity of a judge many people sitting there and a lawyer sitting there with his or her client…Yes, acting.” It was not until another student came to his aid that he excitedly said “acting.” This lack of adequate English communication skills clearly put students at a disadvantage.

As indicated by Teacher Katungwa, students’ lack of English proficiency skills also frustrated teachers because it made it much more difficult to cover the syllabus. When asked if students were able to read the textbook and make good notes given that English was not their first language, Teacher Katungwa explained:
In fact they don’t. And I think you have realized in this school we try to give them notes because we know if we give them that leeway, make your own notes, they can easily photocopy the textbook because they cannot read and try to get the points. And also given the kinds of learners that we have you know also um the intelligence is down... We like giving them notes. I give them my notebook they just go and copy. Yeah. Otherwise it is not easy to move because some of them get confused they cannot write anything.

If then students are not able to read notes and summarize, one wonders how much harder it would be for them to hold a healthy discussion or a debate in a language they find so difficult to understand. The implications are that such students may not want to voice their views even when given the opportunity to do so. Consequently, this may discourage the few teachers who would like to use learner-centred approaches from doing so, thereby robbing teachers and learners of interactions that are a characteristic of democratic learning environments.

A number of scholars have cited lack of adequate English communication skills as an impediment to academic achievement in many African schools (Arthur, 2001; Brock-Utne, 2001; Bunyi, 1999; Dembele & Lefoka, 2002). A good illustration in provided by Brock-Utne (2001) who points out that although English language is accorded high status in Tanzania, neither the teachers nor the students are proficient in the language, which leads to poor academic performance. Bunyi (1999) also reports the challenges teachers and students in Kenya face especially in rural areas where children do not have access to English language. These reports echo Obanya’s words (1980, p. 88, as cited in Brock-Utne, 2001):

It has always been felt by African educationists that the African child’s major learning problem is linguistic. Instruction is given in a language that is not normally used in his immediate environment, a language which neither the learner nor the teacher understands and uses well enough. (p. 115)
Thus, English as the language of instruction contributes significantly in stifling students’ voice.

**Material infrastructure.**

For the purpose of this study, material infrastructure includes instructional resources, class size, equipment and facilities.

Conversations with students revealed that there was discontentment among them due to the scarcity or lack of resource books in their libraries and computers to carry out research (Frank, Interview). Frank further explained that if they had resource persons going to speak on issues such as politics, they would comprehend “what they were being taught.” The issue of using guest speakers as a resource was also raised by Teacher Hekima (the only teacher who talked about resources) when she noted that such a person would give students first-hand information.

Although observations revealed students were crammed in small classes and the average student/teacher ratio was 48:1, none of the teachers viewed this as a challenge. In my view, this was not an issue to the teachers and the administration because the class sizes were relatively small compared to elementary school classes where free primary education had seen the numbers soar to more than 70 students per class (Mukudi, 2004; Nzomo, 2003). In addition, teachers did not raise the issue of students sharing textbooks or lack of books in the libraries. At Kapana High School, a sizeable library had just been completed but it had no books. They also had a big computer room with a few computers. At Lango High School, the condition of the “library” was deplorable. The field notes that follow illustrate this.

At 3.00 in the afternoon I walked to the library to ask the teacher in charge of the library whether I could hold my interviews in the library. The library was
attached to one of the staffrooms. Upon entering the library, I realized it was not any bigger than the classrooms. Ripped books, most of which were literature texts for different grades, were strewn all over the dusty shelves. There were a few benches and no reading desks. Though cracked and rough, the floor looked relatively clean. Except for the teacher who used the little library office, there was no evidence that teachers or students ever visited the library.

In addition, unlike Kapana High School, Lango High School did not have any computers. It was also observed that in both schools a textbook was shared at least by two students, so even when the teacher asked students to read and make notes, they had to negotiate who would have the textbook first. Also, as earlier mentioned, apart from the student textbook, the syllabus and the notes they had made, teachers did not have any other instructional materials. Although both schools had electricity, there were no televisions that teachers could use as instructional tools to show videos or films.

These findings are a common theme in many studies done in African schools (Altinyelken, 2010; Coombe, 1997; Dembele & Lefoka, 2007; Guthrie, 1990; Moon, 2007; O’Sullivan, 2004; Rowell, 1995; Samoff, 2003b; Vavrus, 2009). Samoff (2003b) points out that although governments in Sub-Saharan African countries are committed to improving education, they are often in economic distress; consequently, they are incapable of providing resources necessary for quality education. He illustrates this by drawing comparisons between African countries and other contexts. He notes that by 1995, for example, Sub-Saharan Africa was spending $87 per student; North America, $5,150; Europe, $4,552; and Latin America and the Caribbean, $444 (Samoff, 2003b, p. 417). This one comparison is indicative of how challenging it is for African governments to improve material
infrastructure. Sadly, for the majority of the above scholars, lack of resources significantly contributed to the use of teacher-centred approaches and rote memorization of facts, just as inadequate teacher training did.

**Teacher training.**

As already mentioned, the Ministry of Education acknowledges that universities and colleges that offer teacher education programs are too overcrowded for teacher educators to effectively focus on teaching methodology. The ministry also raised the concern that once teachers graduate, there are few or no opportunities for professional development, and as such, most teachers rely on their pre-service teaching skills (MOEST, 2005). This is echoed by Coombe (1997) and Moon (2007) who note that for most teachers in Africa the only professional knowledge they have had was acquired in the pre-service program. This raises concerns because if education in Africa is to be transformative, teacher training requires serious attention (Ukpokodu, 1997, Altinyelken, 2010).

Comparing the level of teacher training between developing nations and developed nations, Farrell (2003) notes that in developing nations, many primary teachers have low level education and little or no pedagogical training, unlike in developed countries where almost all teachers have university degrees and have received high-level pedagogical training. He further notes that if teachers in developing nations received some pre-service training or in-service training, this could significantly improve teaching performance and student learning. Although Farrell’s (2003) explanation focuses on primary teacher education, this explanation could also be applied to high school teaching because, as noted by Asimeng-Boahene (2003), many social studies teachers lacked proper training.
More recently, the concern about the quality of teacher education in Kenya was articulated at an international conference whose theme was “Innovation and Teacher Education and Classroom Practice in the 21st Century.” At this conference, scholars advocated for the complete overhaul of teacher training programs. Dr. George Eshiwani, a former vice-chancellor of Kenyatta University, the biggest teacher training university in Kenya, lamented that teacher programs produced teachers “who were not capable of responding to the changing school environment” (Siringi, 2009, p. 4). According to Siringi, Eshiwani argued that the mode of training teachers in Kenya was ineffective because it was invented in 1970. If this argument is anything to go by, then it means teacher educators are still using traditional methods of teaching to teach teachers. Do we then expect high school and elementary teachers to teach any differently? The acknowledgement of such loopholes in the teacher education programs is an indication that there are windows of opportunities through which educational reform geared towards emancipatory teaching is possible.

As already stated, the teachers observed seemed quite concerned about their students’ education and they did the best to help them become “successful” citizens. However, there was little evidence to indicate teachers equipped learners with the kind of skills that they needed in order to become active citizens. The fact that teachers perceived question-and-answer method that elicited factual information from students as “using discussions where students voiced their views” was telling enough. In addition, the lack of incorporating current issues as a way of connecting historical facts to the students’ lives pointed to the fact that teachers did not seem to know how to do so or why it was critical to do so. Consequently, controversial issues that could have triggered discussions on peace and social justice issues were unintentionally masked. Also, as far as instructional resources were concerned, teachers
relied on the student textbooks as the only source of information and did not incorporate other inexpensive materials that could have been easily accessible such as newspapers. Thus, despite the many challenges that hampered effective teaching of history and government, lack of training on how to teach history in a way that would make it a useful tool of dealing with the challenges of the day seemed to be a major factor.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2001) argue that for teachers to be able to teach from a critical stance, they should be exposed to the kind of professional development that promotes an inquiry stance, one that does not focus on teaching facts only, but also focuses on the way of being in the world. This is echoed by Hussein (2006) who points out that if students are to be exposed to the type of education that can transform human and social conditions in Africa, then teacher programs should introduce transformative learning to help teachers to critically examine the impact of ethno-nationalism, tribal classification and political violence. He further explains that this would raise teachers’ consciousness in issues pertaining to how power relations are negotiated and maintained by different groups in a multicultural society. Unfortunately and as already stated, in Kenya professional development opportunities for teachers are rather rare and the cases of Lango and Kapana High School teachers are no exception. Apart from Teacher Syombua who had gone back to school and received a master’s degree, the rest of the teachers had not received any form of professional development since they graduated, which was an average period of 12 years. As Teacher Syombua had explained, her going back to school was solely for what she described as personal interest rather than professional development.

In brief, coupled with all other challenges, the issue of inadequate training and lack of professional development opportunities for teachers make the already complex situation even
more complex. Asimeng-Boahene (2003) provides a stark description of everyday realities of social studies teachers by pointing out that “African social studies teachers currently serve in positions that could be classified as splendid misery or dignified slavery” (p. 61). Can one, then, envision democratic pedagogical and curricular possibilities in such a murky and complex situation?

**Pedagogical and Curricular Possibilities**

Throughout this dissertation, critical constructivism is perceived as an approach that promotes democracy and as an alternative to traditional methods of teaching. Critical constructivism, which developed from Piaget’s cognitive constructivism theory (Hanuka & Anderson, 1998), like critical pedagogy, does not limit teaching to consumption of facts. Constructivists believe that when students receive information, they construct new knowledge as they actively process the information received. To constructivists, learning is not passive and its goals are emancipatory. This implies that it enables learners to express their views, present their problems for inquiry and relate them to their lives (Watts & Jofili, 1998). However, for such democratic learning processes to succeed, teachers are encouraged to validate learners’ knowledge (Watts & Jofili, 1999). This kind of learning that legitimizes students’ views is supported by other scholars such as McLaren and Leonard (1993), Kincheloe (1993), and McLaren and Lankshear (1994). Freire’s philosophy of pedagogy is also relevant here in that the pedagogy is “a way of thinking about, negotiating, and transforming the relationships among classroom teaching, the production of knowledge, the institutional structures of the school, and the social and material relations of the wider community, society and nation-state” (McLaren, 2000, p. 28). Thus, these theories have the potential of transforming societies—Kenyan society included—into more egalitarian
societies and into less violent ones. This raises several questions, however. In the face of all the challenges, is it possible to translate these principles into practice in the Kenyan context? Would policy makers, administrators, teachers, students, parents and other possible stakeholders embrace the principles embedded in these “foreign” theories? Would teachers embrace this way of thinking that seems to be in opposition with African cultural beliefs and their own beliefs which are influenced by class, ethnicity, gender, and religion? How can teachers integrate some of the principles of these theories and at the same time maintain culturally responsive civic education? The answers to most of these questions, as explained below, lie in the stakeholders’ views about the relevance of teaching civic education (history and government).

Stakeholders’ views, though varied, pointed to the positive ways in which history and government influences individuals’ lives. Some of those views included moulding students to become leaders, obedient, responsible, respectful, patriotic and caring, most of which would fit into the categories of the kinds of citizens described by Kahne and Westheimer (2003) and Westheimer (2008). Working towards a more just and peaceful society would mean embracing not just the responsible and the participatory notions of a good citizen, but also one that is justice-oriented. The three kinds of citizens should be seen as complementary, never as competing notions (Kahne & Westheimer, 2003). The possibility of Kenyan schools embracing the justice-oriented citizen lies in the fact that many stakeholders acknowledged the shortcomings of the curriculum and the teaching practices and seemed receptive to alternative ways. For instance, Kapana principal felt that:

\[\text{Further details on the different kinds of citizens are presented on pp. 47-48.}\]
the only thing that I thought about was the review of the curriculum and maybe the curriculum content which I am sure you have looked at. Because I personally feel that may be it ought to umm may be the government—because we have the body that looks at the curriculum—I feel we need to go back and re-evaluate our curriculum, especially in history and government. Because it is only after doing that that we are able to produce the kind of products that we desire—the students we desire. So they make our education system a little bit practical. It should be relevant. It should not just be an issue of history and government and class. It should be something that will be able to help them here and even out there…we need to address this issue very seriously. History and government, we need to address this issue because the trend in our country I think it is a bit alarming.

Overhauling the curriculum and making it practical and relevant may seem to be a viable solution. Nevertheless, school realities in Kenya tell a different story, and it is these realities that administrators (and other key stakeholders) must address if reforms are to be implemented. There is some evidence (though not from scholarly literature) that administrators are already addressing some of these realities by advocating less emphasis on examinations. Reporting for the *Daily Nation* newspaper, Siringi (2009) writes that “head teachers are in Mombasa for a forum that could herald a shake-up of the country’s education system…the[ir] proposals include calls for a review of the education system to reduce emphasis on examinations…[to] allow learners to develop their talents and skills” (p.54).

Deemphasizing examinations would be a milestone in Kenya’s educational system. It would take many progressive-inclined teachers away from traditional methods of teaching. As noted by Kubow (2007), some teachers are aware examination-oriented curricula hinder democratic practices in the classroom. In fact, Vavrus (2009) who carried out a study in Tanzania to examine if social constructivism—a clear divergence from traditional methods—
could be incorporated in schools found out that examination systems in schools played a
major role in hampering the success of this approach, although teachers were enthusiastic
about using the approach.

The possibility of infusing learner-centred approaches in African classrooms to create
spaces for dialogue is viewed only as a distant dream by many scholars (Altinyelken, 2010;
Coombe, 1997; Dembele & Lefoka, 2002; Fuller, 1987; Guthrie, 1990; Hardman et al., 2008;
Moon, 2007; O’Sullivan, 2004; Rowell, 1995; Vavrus, 2009). While these scholars base their
claim on the scarcity of resources and the demands examinations place on teachers and
students, there are others who view principles derived from critical constructivism or critical
pedagogy as hegemonic and therefore should not be introduced to other cultures at all. One
of those critics is Bowers (2005) who argues that constructivists and critical pedagogues
impose their worldviews on other cultures and overlook how “different cultures contribute to
forms of the intercultural renewal essential to ecological sustainability, as well as to
community and environmentally destructive patterns” (p. 35). Referring to critical
constructivism as “the Trojan horse of Western imperialism,” he contends that allowing
students to construct their own knowledge and “continually renaming the world” is
problematic because cultural knowledge (or what he calls intergenerational knowledge)
would be deemed irrelevant. To him, the philosophies of Piaget, Dewey and Freire, among
others, are more destructive than constructive. Following this line of thought is Tabulawa
(2003) who contends that learner-centred approaches are embedded in Western culture which
encourages individualistic tendencies necessary for individuals to survive in a liberal
democratic capitalist society. To him, these approaches only succeed in promoting the
reproduction of capitalism in periphery states, which contradicts African indigenous
knowledges. But Dei (2010), who is an ardent supporter of indigenous knowledges, argues that education in the global era should provide learners with tools to enable them to function in a global market. This includes helping learners to achieve competence in international languages (Dei & Asgharzadeh, 2006). Nevertheless, Dei (2010) encourages the infusion of indigenous knowledges in African schools’ curricula by arguing that the wisdom and instruction inherent in African folklore fosters a shared sense of identity and collective belonging. Even as he advocates for the legitimization of indigenous ways of knowing, he is quick to add that African educational philosophy does not devalue other ways of knowing but rather embraces the coexistence of multiple knowledges.

The views expressed by some of the above scholars point to the impracticability of applying both critical constructivism pedagogical practices in some contexts, such as in developing countries. Reporting on studies carried out in developing countries such as Kenya and Tanzania pertaining to the use of student-centred pedagogies, AIR and Ginsburg (2006), point out that some teachers were able to implement these pedagogies whenever they were not under pressure to ensure students’ success on examinations. Thus, to AIR and Ginsburg (2006), addressing challenges such as those associated with high-stakes testing, teacher training and cultural beliefs would encourage teachers to gravitate more towards active-learning, learner-centred pedagogies appropriate for their contexts. In defense of Freire’s philosophy, McLaren (2000) argues that Freire expected educators to modify his ideas to suit their own contexts. He, Freire, believes that “the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic in his own or her own specific cultural and historical context” (1997a, p. 308, as cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 31). In fact, infusing new approaches to create spaces for
democratic learning processes is not impossible (Beck, Hart, & Kosnik, 2002; Bickmore, 2008). Citing AIR and Ginsburg (2006), Bickmore (2008), for example, argues that “there is no reason to assume that dialogic elicitive pedagogies are unworkable, foreign or culturally inappropriate in resource-poor or so-called third-world contexts” (p. 448). In fact, culturally appropriate dialogues that relate to peace and democracy can easily be generated from African folktales. As already mentioned in chapter two, lessons on fairness and resistance are usually embedded in African folktales and analyzing them and connecting them with students’ lives would help students see their world through a critical lens and hopefully help them challenge the injustices in their world. In addition, use of folklore would not be financially demanding because African communities still have elderly people who can be a rich resource.

Although some authors view [critical] constructivism approaches as solely foreign, there is also literature that indicates that some of these approaches actually have a great resemblance to African indigenous methods of teaching. Kenyatta (1938), for example, points out that experiential learning is a method used in most African societies; children learned by doing. Therefore, if schools modeled what was happening in the society today, for example, allowing students to establish their own parliaments to practice what happens in the real world, they would actually be using an age-old African method of teaching. Pre-colonial education was very much connected to what was happening in children’s social worlds; this is a principle held dear by critical constructivists.

Indeed, Grant and Asimeng-Boahene (2006) point out that it is possible to teach civic education that reflects on the culture and beliefs of students and their communities by integrating African proverbs into lessons. Given that civic education is expected to address
issues found in students’ social worlds, proverbs would be an effective tool because
“proverbs are socially constructed systems of meanings and understanding and philosophy
that frame African living, values, worldview and belief systems…proverbs are a collective
wisdom that gives guidance about living, seeing and being in the world” (p. 20). For these
authors, proverbs would be effective for several reasons:

a. Proverbs provide insights into events and personalities and can explain a point of
   view not amplified by the textbooks view.
b. Proverbs provide different points of view and pose many questions.
c. Proverbs encourage children to use thinking skills to strengthen their analytical
   ability.
d. Proverbs help to explain and illustrate the complexity of cultures.
e. Proverbs help bridge the cultural values gap between African and the Western
cultures in an ethnically and racially diverse world. (p. 20)

Therefore, blending African folklore with learner-centred approaches to teach civic education
holds promise for validating African indigenous ways of knowing as well as infusing
democratic/learner-centred pedagogical approaches in Kenyan schools. Suggesting that
learner-centred approaches are foreign and therefore should not be used in African schools
would be denying students the opportunity to learn to function as global citizens (Banks,
2001).

The analysis of the Kenya history and government official curriculum revealed that
the curriculum offered many opportunities where teachers could introduce discussions that
may lead to the development of political consciousness. For example, the curriculum stated
that one of the goals of history was to create students’ awareness of their rights and
responsibilities in order to promote a just and peaceful society. Educators could use such a
goal as an entry point to discuss relevant issues related to peace and justice in the society. But
for educators to be able to assume the role of a facilitator or to engage students in sensitive
and controversial issues, they require appropriate pedagogical skills (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008). These skills would move teachers away from transmitting facts to using real life situations. Using real life situations would in turn require teachers to learn to use readily available and inexpensive materials to make teaching of controversial issues a reality in the Kenyan context. For example, schools in Kenya receive one newspaper daily. Teachers could use newspaper articles to connect the history world with the students’ lived experiences. Asking students to write diaries on personal reflections relating historical events to events in their lives or writing letters responding to situations could give voice to students.

Using simulations or drama could also be used to make students active because it provides opportunities to think, make decisions and to explore content in depth (Morris, 2001). In Kenya, for instance, teachers could use participatory theatre groups whose main objective is to raise citizens’ political awareness. Bickmore (2008) follows this line of thought by pointing out that in the context of teaching peace and conflict, teachers could use drama-based lessons to develop students’ understandings of conflict and ability to address it. Forming groups to discuss, for example, distinct perspectives on understanding, and, more rarely, presented as a historical fact could also stimulate students’ critical thinking. In fact, as Bickmore (2008) notes, activities that encourage students to actively participate in their learning are innumerable. However, these varied ways of creating dialogic spaces cannot be effective if teachers’ beliefs and values are not put into account (Fullan, 1991).

Speaking about school innovations, Fullan (1991) notes that “the real crunch comes in the relationship between these new programs or policies and the thousands of subjective realities embedded in people’s individual and organizational contexts and their personal histories” (p. 43). From these personal histories emerge personal theories and belief systems
that influence educators’ perceptions and actions. Their beliefs and values may either impede or embrace any suggested curricular or pedagogical changes. For example, teachers may deal with issues of racism, ethnicity, sexism, disability, authoritarianism, etc. differently depending on how they have been socialized. In most African contexts, for example, children are socialized not to talk back to adults, but to listen and obey. Spanking is part of child-rearing practices.

These authoritarian practices are not confined in people’s homes only, but they are transferred to public institutions such as school or classroom settings. These settings are already authoritarian because they follow the colonial missionary model of schooling which included inculcating discipline and exerting control over children (Tabulawa, 1997). Therefore, the teachers in these settings, now adults, were spanked at home; they were spanked by their teachers; they had their ears pulled by neighbours to discipline them, and because of all this, they had learned never to question. And now, having been socialized thus, they perceive their harmful practices as “normal;” they believe they should spank students; they believe their authority should never be challenged by students; they believe that students should only listen. These deep-seated beliefs have been reported by many scholars such as Akyeampong and Stephens (2002), Dunne (2007), Harber (2002, 2004), Hardman et al. (2008), Leach and Humphrey (2007) and Tabulawa (1997). For example, in a study that examined how personal backgrounds and socio-political forces shaped teachers’ roles in Ghana, Akyeampong and Stephens (2002) found out that teachers’ practices were significantly influenced by their local cultures and personal values. Some of the teachers believed caning students was acceptable as long as it was not excessive, which was in conflict with what they had learnt at the teacher college. Many teachers in Africa believe that
loss of cultural values had led to the loss of teachers’ control (Jessop & Penny, 1998) and to recapture this control, most stakeholders in Kenya feel that the ban on canning should be lifted. The stakeholders, most of who include teachers and parents, argue that banning canning had contributed to students’ unacceptable behavior as it had eliminated one of the most effective elements of schools’ disciplinary mechanisms. The stakeholders further argue that the ban had left schools with no alternatives for teachers to discipline wayward students (Munyiri & Mwaniki, 2008). This kind of authoritarianism would make it difficult to create a positive and safe environment where students would openly express their views.

It is clear that change can sometimes be in opposition with an individual’s core values. Therefore, it is important to introduce, among all stakeholders, open discussions on socio-cultural beliefs that may hinder the realization of any desired change. For example, introducing open discussions on some of the principles of critical constructivism that may be in opposition to educators’ beliefs in teacher education programs would be a safe place to start.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted the many challenges that teachers of history in Kenya face and how these challenges hinder the promotion of peace and democracy in schools. Although the challenges seem insurmountable, it is still possible for teachers to navigate through some of these challenges if given the necessary training. The training would have to include teaching history through a critical lens so that teachers are able to critically interpret the official curriculum and unearth the hidden messages that can promote peace in the country. It would also mean addressing issues regarding teachers’ beliefs and value systems. But for them to be able to disseminate the curriculum in a more effective manner, teachers
would need the support of the principals because as Gérin-Lajoie (2008) says, they have the power to decide what is to be prioritized.

Change is not easy and it involves struggle. If teachers are committed to change then they must have the conviction that this is indeed possible. The word “possibility” does not in any way guarantee solutions to the challenges that continue to plague the teaching of civic education in Kenya; nevertheless, it keeps the dream of a better tomorrow alive, for without dreams, the motivation of working towards finding solutions wanes.
Chapter Eight:  
Conclusion

No amount of educational research, no development, no special programs or compensatory services, no restructuring or retraining of teachers will make fundamental differences until we concede that for many students, the only sane alternative to not-learning is the acknowledgement and direct confrontation of oppression—social, sexual and economic—both in school and in society. Education built on accepting that hard truth about our society can break through not-learning and lead students and teachers together, not to the solution of problems but to direct intelligent engagement in the struggles that might lead to solutions. (Kohl, 1994, p. 135)

Revisiting Civic Education Issues in Kenya

This chapter provides closure to the study and highlights several key points: the principal research question; the study’s major findings; significance of the study; and implications and suggestions for further research.

The principal research question.

The principal question of this investigation has been “To what extent does civic education curriculum in Kenya create dialogic spaces where issues of social difference, peace, democracy and social justice are addressed?” To answer this question, three areas were selected for examination. The first area was the official curriculum. It was necessary to examine the official documents to get insights into how the curriculum promoted or failed to promote peace and democracy. The second area looked into how teachers and students made sense of the curriculum, and the third area examined pedagogical practices in history and government classes.

The presence of violence found in Kenyan schools and the ethnic violence in the wider society prompted me to carry out this study. If schooling was supposed to benefit
individuals and societies, I was curious to know what schooling did or did not do, through the
teaching of civic education, to foster peace in Kenya.

**Findings.**

The primary finding of this research was that, for the most part, civic education in
Kenya does not promote the kind of peace and democracy envisioned in this study. In the
introductory chapter, I discussed how the notions of peace and democracy are
conceptualized. I stated that peace cannot only be defined as the absence of war or physical
violence because it also means the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1964, 1969). I
also explained that governments are said to promote democracy when they accord citizens
freedom (which includes social and cultural freedom) (Kubow, 2007, p. 309), political
equality, control over public policies, and equal influence over debate and decision-making
(Diamond & Morlino, 2004). Therefore, when students are given the freedom and the
opportunity to learn by discussing societal oppression in a civic education class, for example,
one can say that schools are indeed working towards the promotion of peace and democracy.
Little of this was observed in this study.

Findings suggest that the history and government official curriculum explicitly
articulates the importance of promoting democracy and social justice, aspects that are viewed
as critical to the promotion of peace and national unity. However, the notion of peace is
conceptualized as the absence of direct violence, which masks the discussion of structural
violence. Clearly articulated, also, is the need to address social difference, yet the documents
do not include or emphasize gender, class and disability. Although the documents articulate
the need to learn about all ethnic groups, the chapters in the student textbooks that discuss
various ethnic groups in Kenya pay attention to the dominant groups. In addition, while the
curriculum emphasizes the need to develop students’ critical consciousness, a majority of the class activities suggested in the syllabus and student textbooks tend to focus more on recall answers rather than higher order thinking skills. The national examination questions also focus on eliciting facts. Another element that the official curriculum emphasizes is the need to mould students into patriotic and law-abiding citizens, which suggests that the course does not prepare justice-oriented citizens (Westheimer, 2004). This notwithstanding, the curriculum has windows of opportunity through which teachers could enact the curriculum in ways that would make its goals emancipatory.

The findings from interviews indicate that teachers felt confident and qualified enough to teach the course effectively. For them, effective teaching, above all else, is that which enables students to pass their examinations. Teachers also felt that the history and government course is fundamental to creating responsible citizens and building a peaceful society. To this end, they emphasized the importance of national unity and patriotism as a means of avoiding direct violence. Like the official curriculum, the teachers conceptualized peace as the absence of direct violence. Thus conceptualized, it was difficult for teachers to use the course as a tool through which peace and democracy could be promoted by discussing structural violence. Despite this, the teachers portrayed exemplary commitment to the students’ academic success and although their teaching approach was authoritarian, their intentions were well-meaning.

Further findings revealed that it was difficult for teachers to create spaces where fruitful classroom dialogue would thrive because they found themselves working in an environment that favoured, nurtured and sustained the transmission orientation towards teaching (Miller & Miller, 1990). The works of Apple (2001, 2003), Apple and Beane (1995),
John Dewey (1916/1966, 1939), and Freire (1993) embrace critical constructivism as a democratic education practice where the teacher and the students become co-authors of knowledge through dialogue generated from real-life social issues. However, through this study, I have come to understand that pedagogical practices supported by critical constructivism and critical pedagogy are rather difficult to implement. The literature on these theories makes a good case for these practices; nevertheless, it does not address how teachers’ environment or context may foster or hamper the use of these practices. In Kenya, for example, I found that the “traditional” methods of teaching are sustained in several ways:

1. The organization of the course—organization here refers to the prescribed syllabus the teachers were expected to cover, the textbooks used and examinations written. For example, although the syllabus was broad, the course was allotted only 120 minutes per week. This forced most of the teachers to lecture. In addition, given that the curriculum and the textbooks were centralized and all students in the country wrote the same examination, teachers taught to the test to help their students pass the national examinations; they spent most of their time “drilling” the students. Hence, although the curriculum documents explicitly mentioned the importance of promoting peace and democracy, aspects that are viewed as critical to the promotion of peace and democracy remained at a rhetorical level.

2. Language of instruction—once a second language becomes the medium of instruction, students’ power to express their opinions clearly and confidently is taken away. In Kenya, for example, even when students were given the opportunity to do presentations, they regurgitated the information they had
memorized for lack of sufficient English language skills. Thus, English as the medium of instruction became a barrier to students’ active participation.

3. Culture—literature on learner-centred pedagogical practices suggests that these practices contradict African cultural values and beliefs pertaining to child-adult relationships (Tabulawa, 1997, 2003). In most African cultures, children are not supposed to challenge or question the opinion of adults. Given that schools are part of the wider society, it was difficult for students to challenge what teachers said or question the knowledge presented in textbooks.

4. Teachers’ lack of autonomy— the existence of bureaucratic hierarchy compelled teachers to follow the prescribed curriculum and often felt uncomfortable discussing controversial issues.

5. Lack of adequate training and resources—there was little evidence that teachers had been exposed to other instructional methodologies other than those associated with the transmission orientation. None of the teachers had any training regarding transformative teaching. The situation became even more complex because teachers had no reference books or other supplementary materials for the course.

In short, implementing pedagogical practices that are in line with critical constructivism and critical pedagogy is not an easy task. Teaching educators these theories and the pedagogical practices they embrace may not suffice unless most of the barriers that teachers face are dealt with. For example, for teachers to move away from transmission orientation, they would need to incorporate activities such as having students sit in groups to discuss a certain topic in history. Students may watch a video related to the topic and then
they may be told to write journals relating the issues to personal experiences which would later be shared with group members or the rest of the class. Such an approach would be difficult to implement in Kenya for several reasons. For example, students and parents would perceive such an approach as digressing from the prescribed curriculum on which national examinations are based; consequently, parents and students would not support it. In addition, using electronic gadgets such as televisions as instructional tools is not feasible because, as earlier stated, most schools do not have televisions. Most schools do not have computers that can assist students to carry out research on projects nor do they have well-equipped libraries, unlike in the developed countries such as Canada or the U.S.

Although teachers in developed countries do not work in contexts free of complexities, the issues they face may not be of the same magnitude. In Canada and the U.S., for example, majority of the schools are well equipped with books, computers, televisions, etc. Students can easily gather information from the Internet or from a film which they can use to generate a group discussion. Besides, in North America, for the most part, teachers are trained to use learner-centred practices and professional development is available for teachers. This is not to say that teachers in developed countries use democratic practices in their classrooms. For example, in the United States, teachers have reverted to teacher-centred methodologies due to standardized testing (Higgins et al, 2006; Rothstein, 2008). Furthermore, teachers may decide to use teacher-centred approaches depending on their belief and value system. Thus, if it is difficult to employ learner-centred practices in contexts where resources are in abundance, then in contexts where resources are scarce, it may be a distant dream for now.
Implications of the study.

Socio-cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the official, the enacted and the hidden curricula. Both teachers and students have been socialized to view their world and positions according to the society’s expectations. For instance, women and children have internalized their assigned positions at the bottom of the social ladder, and for the most part, view this as the norm. To argue otherwise would be viewed as deviating or failing to conform to social expectations. Consequently, disrupting this order becomes an uphill battle because it directly speaks to power relations and the structural inequalities that come with it. Teachers may not, for example, address issues of gender inequality in the classroom because what an “outsider” might view as unequal power relations may be viewed as a normative social pattern. Likewise, social patterns that expect children to always listen to adults may negatively influence teachers’ willingness to share their authority with students. Parents may also expect educators to exert authority on their children. This has implications for administrators, policy makers and curriculum developers that for changes to be implemented, educators and parents should be included in school and curriculum decision-making processes, which may include curriculum issues that seem to contradict cultural beliefs.

Thus, using critical constructivism practices does not require training teachers only. Teachers may get the training and may be willing to implement the change; however, they might encounter opposition from administrators, parents or the students. To implement any change, Thiessen (1992) suggests that even as teachers try to share classroom decisions with their students, they should negotiate with other stakeholders for political and structural support. Without such support, teachers would not feel comfortable to try new innovations that may improve the quality of their teaching.
The study identified lack of in-service training or professional development as one of the factors that contributed to teacher-centred practices. Suggesting in-service training for teachers would not be impractical given that most African economies are already on their knees. This implies that schools would have to look for alternatives. One such alternative would be establishing professional communities that would give teachers both professional and emotional support (Huberman, 1993). Clark (1992) reminds us that teachers are reflective professionals who should be allowed to design their own professional development. Having teachers mentoring other teachers would also work as an alternative in some schools.

This study has suggested that given that some principles of critical constructivism contradict African cultural beliefs, it might be challenged by many stakeholders; therefore, for it to find a place in African cultures, it would have to be integrated with African folklore to create a middle ground where constructivism approaches and use of folklore would play a complementary role.

**Significance of the study.**

As previously stated in Chapter 3, I was able to carry out observations using a cultural lens as an “insider” and a critical lens as an “outsider.” As an outsider, I attempted to unearth underlying messages that may have promoted or hampered the promotion of peace and democracy through the teaching of history and government.

One underlying message in this study is that schools seemed to reinforce the superiority of English. This was manifest in the students’ unwillingness to use Kiswahili during the interviews. The linguistic capital accorded English contradicted the promotion of democracy in the sense that it implicitly inflicted cultural violence by devaluing African
languages that were vehicles of the very cultures the official curriculum sought to promote. One way of addressing this tension that exists between the use of African languages and the use of English would be to use African folklore in civic education lessons. Having students collect folktales from their communities and translating them into English would not only validate indigenous languages, but it would also help students develop their English writing skills as well as communicate messages of empathy and collectivism that are usually embedded in most African folklore.

Another significant point is that school strikes that are viewed as students’ deviance is actually the students’ way of exercising their democratic right. Critical constructivism encourages students to express their opinions, even when they contradict the opinions of those in authority. Critical constructivism encourages students to be actively involved in decision-making processes and policies that affect their lives. If their democratic right is taken away, they take an alternative route to do so. Even in the most authoritarian climates, students have agency that can be expressed in different forms, one of which is strikes.

Given that there have been no studies that have critically examined the role played by the history and government course in Kenyan schools, the knowledge gained in this study contributes to a better understanding of the realities of teaching civic education in Kenya. Also, the fact that many studies in Kenya have not included the voice of the students who are some of the primary stakeholders, by including students’ views in this study, their voice provides insights into the way they make sense of their classroom realities.

These insights pointed to the need to change the way the curriculum is enacted by including meaningful discussions, debates, simulations, field trips and inviting resource persons to their classrooms. It meant shifting from teacher-centred methods to more student-
centred practices. From these views, it is reasonable to conclude that students were yearning for active learning where they could share their opinions through discussions and debates. It was also evident that students wished to connect what they were learning with what was happening in the wider society. Therefore, incorporating drama, field trips to places such as the parliament, and inviting resource persons or guest speakers were viewed as ways of bridging the two worlds. In fact, this would not only be a bridge between the two worlds, but it would also be an excellent gateway for introducing indigenous knowledge as a rich resource that can be used to promote peace and democracy in Kenya.

Infusing African collectivist humanism into the curriculum would directly speak to some of the social injustices that breed structural violence, violence that is masked both in the official and the enacted curricula. In most African communities, the notion of “being human” (Ubuntu) is emphasized. Speaking of Ubuntu as an African philosophy of being, Swanson (2009) notes that “Ubuntu is borne out of the philosophy that community strength comes of community support, (emphasis in the original) and that dignity and identity are achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity and community commitment” (p.11). This notion of communitarianism, however, does not mean masking the social and political effects that power has on people’s lived experiences, but it should be viewed as a conscious attempt to reverse these effects in bringing together an understanding of common investment of humanity inextricably bound up together…a disposition in consonance with Ubuntu would mean becoming receptive to others and other ways, while offering a generosity of heart and spirit. It is centred on an accepted communal obligation to justice rather than ‘individual rights.’ It would mean a way of seeking inner sanctum that gives rise to compassion, self-effacement, mutual understanding, and humble spirituality (Swanson, 2009, p.11).

The fact that Ubuntu emphasizes communal obligation to justice holds promise in addressing issues pertaining to structural violence. Although Western capitalism tends to
undermine collectivism by implicitly promoting individualism, communitarianism has not been completely erased and can be revitalized by introducing it in schools. Just as it was passed on from one generation to the next through proverbs, folktales, songs and dance, Ubuntu or being human can be incorporated in the school curriculum. For example, schools can invite elders from their communities as guest speakers to talk about African indigenous ways of being from which healthy discussions on social justice can be generated. In addition, there are many participatory theatre groups whose objective is to address social issues. If such groups were invited to a civic education class, their messages would also generate discussions on issues that directly affect students’ lives. Therefore, embracing these alternative teaching practices would be a move towards teaching that is more empowering and liberating.

Suggestions for further research.

Given that very few qualitative studies pertaining to citizenship education have been done in Africa (Kenya in particular), it would be worthwhile to carry out more studies in this area. This study focused only on two schools that catered mostly to children from working class families. It would be interesting to investigate the teaching of history and government in the “more privileged” schools (also known as high-cost schools). Such schools deal with a different clientele and often their teachers are perceived as the most qualified. These schools often have relatively adequate instructional resources and investigating teachers’ practices in such schools might produce new information. Even more interesting would be incorporating schools in rural areas for comparative purposes. This would shed light on how pedagogical practices are adopted and shaped in different school contexts within a country.
In this study I have explained that lack of proper teacher training and teacher professional development is one of the impediments to effective teaching of civic education. Even so, there is little evidence that teacher programs offer any form of transformative learning that would help teachers teach with the vision of creating politically active citizens. Here transformative learning is perceived as that learning that involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our ways of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our-body-awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and personal joy. (O’Sullivan, Morrell, & O’Connor, 2002, p. xvii)

It would therefore be interesting to investigate what kinds of teacher programs are available. Thus, research to examine whether teacher education adopts a critical/reflective inquiry that includes “dialogue oriented towards achieving true democratic participation by all members of the community” (Foster, 1986, p. 30) would provide great insights.

Although studies indicate teachers’ beliefs and values play a significant role in shaping the way they enact the curriculum, this remains an area that has not been explored in depth. Exploring teachers’ beliefs especially in the area of using critical constructivism approaches to teach civic education in developing countries would provide further insight into how to implement educational change. And as Kohl (1994) has suggested, any change that may lead us closer to finding solutions to societal oppression is worth implementing.
References


Apple, M., & Jungck, S. (1992). You don't have to be a teacher to teach this unit: Teaching technology and control in the classroom. In M. Fullan & A. Hargreaves (Eds.), Teacher development and educational change (pp. 20-42). London: Falmer.


Elabor-Idemudia, P. (2000). The retention of knowledge of folkways as a basis for resistance. In G. J. S. Dei, B. L. Hall, & D. G. Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world* (pp. 102-119). Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press.


