PLACING CULTURE AT THE CENTRE
of the
KENYAN CURRICULUM:
A PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH INQUIRY

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B.Ed., Kenyatta University, 1988
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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Center for the Studies of Curriculum and Instruction)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

August, 1998

Department of _Curriculum & Instruction._

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date _SEPT. 03 /98_

DE-6 (2/88)

ABSTRACT

Most societies around the world strive to transmit their culture and world view to succeeding generations through education. This is important because individuals with strong cultural identities become independent and self-reliant people who are functional in their own environment. People who have little sense of their cultural identity or have been alienated from their culture often become dependent and lack the skills of meaningful survival in their own environment.

Societies that have suffered colonial domination in the past can find themselves socializing their children with the cultural values and world view of the colonizing power which obviously undermines their own cultural identity. In the republic of Kenya, this problem has been acknowledged and documented by academics and educators but there seems to be a lack of political will to make effective and lasting changes to the curriculum.

This study explored the kind of curriculum that fosters cultural relevance. It examined ways in which curriculum can become a place in which cultural values, knowledge, skills and beliefs that provide foundations for identity can be understood, defined and interpreted. Five teachers and I came together to explore the possibilities of tapping the local resources to enrich the school curriculum in Kenya so that teachers begin to use both material and human resources which are locally available to meet

curriculum goals. By using the local resources, the learners began to view the local knowledge and skills as being important to school knowledge.

The study employs participatory action research which derives strength from its emphasis on shifting the power balance between the researcher and researched, encouraging dialogical relationships, providing a voice and feelings to disenfranchised peoples and showing commitment to social transformation through action and reflection. The research methods were primarily dialogue and conversations, discussions, creation of discourses and reflections. The thesis documents some of the struggles, tensions and frustrations associated with participatory action research *for* educational change. This research makes clear that experiential knowing emerges through participation with others and people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their actions within it.

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CHAPTER 1

CREATING A CENTER AT THE MARGIN

> Knowledge produced by social science research is a powerful and effective means to influence decisions regarding people's everyday. Whether this influence is detrimental or supportive to a group of people often depends on who controls the research process. (St. Denis, 1989, p. 1)

> Where knowledge is produced about the problems of the powerless, it is more often than not produced by the powerful in the interest of maintaining the status quo, rather than the powerless in the interest of change. (Gaventa, 1993, p. 26)

Locating the Study

While many social science researchers rely heavily on using the experiences of the "other" to gather data that "can help us answer questions about various aspects of society and thus enable us to understand society" (Bailey, 1982, p.32), I come to this study as an "insider." I come to this study as a person who has experienced the painful effects of cultural domination, which has been fueled, in part, by "knowledge" and policies generated from social science research. The study is not however limited to my own experiences because what I have experienced is common to most people who do not have access to powerful decision-making positions in society. As a member of such a group, I have re-searched to learn how social science research can better meet our needs. This is because I realize and acknowledge that social science research is not inherently bad. It is those who pay for the research, and those who decide what "good" research is (St. Denis, 1989, p. 1), that have contributed to the negative effects others and I have

experienced. It is from this perspective that I began the search to understand how to do research *with* and *for* the members of the group in which I belong.

Participatory action research suggests a way in which communities without socio-political power can use social science research to support their struggle for self-determination by gaining control of information that can influence decisions regarding their lives (St.Denis, 1989). Reinharz (1992) affirms that participatory action research is an approach to producing knowledge through democratic, interactive relationships. Researchers work with community[1] members to resolve problems identified by community in a process of research that is intended to empower the participants. Francesca Cancian further identifies three core features of participatory action research:

a) political actions and individual consciousness-raising,

b) democratic relationships and participants sharing/making decisions and acquiring skills,

c) the every day life experience and feelings of participants as a major source of knowledge.

Participants make decisions rather than function as passive subjects of research (cited in Reinharz,1992, p.185).

Because of its emphasis on and respect for human interaction, participatory action research is different from the way research is usually done. Doing such research is a different experience both for the researcher and the communities that have been the "target" of research. Given the nature of human relationships, and the politics of

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[1] The term community is defined in this context as a group of individuals sharing a given interest.

communities, the dynamics of participatory action research become complex (St. Denis, 1989). I found doing such research both a challenge and a responsibility.

The Nature of the Problem

Cultural relevance in curriculum resources has increasingly pre-occupied me in the last few years as a teacher/student on the verge of becoming a teacher/educator. This pre-occupation is a result of my experiences as a student and later as a high school teacher in Kenya, where material developed for curriculum have little consideration for the culture of the people for whom they are developed. Curriculum as developed for Kenyan schools puts a cultural barrier between the children and their community. This means that on returning home, students find it difficult to re-integrate with the people among whom they are expected to interact for the rest of their lives (Maina, 1995).

Indigenous people around the world are re-affirming the validity of their own cultures and re-defining their political, economic, and social priorities in the late twentieth century (Barman, 1986). Central to this process is the re-socialization of the youth with their own culture, giving them a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage. It is a shift made necessary by centuries of colonial domination which deliberately undermined the cultural values of indigenous people through assimilative and later integrative educational policies (Barman, 1986; Kirkness,1992). It is against this background that the educators of First Nations children in Canada are facing the challenging task of recovering the cultural heritage of First Nations while "providing preparation for successful participation in a culturally diverse, modern technological society" (Hamme, 1996, p.21).

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While indigenous people such as the First Nations of Canada, Aborigines of Australia and the Maoris of New Zealand are turning to their cultures and languages in the movement towards educational equality and cultural identity (More, 1992), the Kenyan peoples' priorities are almost opposite. Among Kenyans, traditional cultures and languages have a lower priority for policy makers, parents and educators. Kenya is basically a multi-ethnic country with three major ethno-linguistic groups comprised of over forty-two smaller homogenous communities of people who are distinctly aware of their cultural and linguistic identities. Despite this fact, curriculum is developed by the Ministry of Education and distributed to all the schools for adoption regardless of the linguistic and cultural diversity of the Kenyan people. Because no room is provided for deviation, the teachers adopt the curriculum as prescribed and teach to the curriculum specifications. Thus, the local knowledge and wisdom, cultural values, skills and beliefs that have the potential of enriching the curriculum remain largely untapped. And the learners fail to see the connection between the school knowledge and their local realities, which ultimately gives them a weak cultural identity. Kenyan curriculum in its present context is still geared towards producing an elite society with an overemphasis on academic knowledge measured through a rigorous national exam system. Shiundu (1992) describes it as being "narrow in scope and emphasizing the role of learning for passing national exams to acquire certificates" (p. 30). Curriculum has become a tool of cultural alienation, whereby the learners gradually acquire the cultural identity of other people.

This study seeks to explore the possibilities of tapping the local resources to enrich school curriculum in Kenya, so that teachers can begin to use both material and human resources which are locally available to meet curriculum goals. This idea concurs

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with Mackay's argument that "education must foster, develop and communicate the rich valid cultures of Kenya" (1981, p. 7). This idea is also consistent with recent initiatives by First Nations of Canada, and the study will draw from their experiences. By using the local resources, the learners will begin to view the local knowledge, wisdom, values, beliefs and skills as being important to the understanding of the school knowledge which will help them develop a strong cultural identity. This is important because a strong cultural identity enables individuals to become independent and self-reliant people who are functional in their own environment. People who have little sense of their cultural identity or have been alienated from their culture often become dependent and lack the skills of meaningful survival in their own environment (Maina, 1995). This study explores the kind of curriculum which fosters cultural relevance. It explores ways in which curriculum can be a place in which the cultural values, knowledge, skills and beliefs that provide foundations for identity can be understood, defined and interpreted.

Language of the Study

Elders[2] use abstract metaphors of space to describe the place from which they speak. Ngugi (1993) talks about "moving the center" to create many centers that reflect the diversity of world peoples and cultures. The call for pluralism of cultures by Ngugi (1993) is a response to the external domination that has been forced upon many cultures around the world from a couple of decades to hundred of years. This has resulted in some societies becoming deformed, changing course altogether, or even dying out. Conditions of external domination and control, as much as those of internal domination

and oppression, do not create the necessary climate for the cultural health of any society.

It is therefore necessary to "move the center" and recognize the fact:

> that knowing oneself and one's environment was the correct basis of absorbing the world; that there could never be only one center from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the center. (Ngugi, 1993, p. 9)

bell hooks (1990) talks about the margin becoming a center. To be in the margin, she argues, is to be part of the whole but outside the main body. She further explains that this is important because "black folks coming from poor, underclass communities, who enter universities or privileged cultural settings unwilling to surrender every vestige of 'who we were' before we were there, all 'sign' of our class and cultural 'difference,' who are unwilling to play the role of 'exotic Other,' must create spaces within that culture of domination if we are to survive whole, our souls intact" (1990, p. 148).

> Our presence in such institutions is often a disruption. We are often as much as an "other," a threat to black people from privileged class backgrounds who do not share our perspectives, as we are to uninformed white folks. Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them. Mostly, of course, we are not there. We never 'arrive' or 'can't stay.' Back in those spaces where we come from, we kill ourselves in despair, drowning in nihilism, caught in poverty, in addiction, in every post-modern mode of dying that can be named. Yet when we few remain in that 'other' space, we are often too isolated, too alone. We die there, too. Those of us who live, who 'make' it, passionately holding on to aspects of that 'down-home' life we do not want to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualize alternatives, often improvised. Theorizing about this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice. (hooks, 1990, p.148)

This space of radical openness is what hooks refers to as the margin – a profound edge.

Locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a "safe" place. One is always at

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[2] The word "elder" does not indicate chronological age much as it shows the respect I have for their

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risk. One needs a community of resistance. For hooks, working the margins is being able to identify marginality as much more than a site of deprivation; "it is also the site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (1990, p.149).

> It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives. As such, I was not speaking of marginality one wishes to lose – to give up or surrender as part of moving into the center – but rather of a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers to one the possibility of radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds.
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> This is not a mythic notion of marginality. It comes from lived experience. (hooks, 1990, 150)

Perhaps it would be presumptuous on my part to say that Ngugi (1993) and hooks (1990) speak directly about my own experiences. But to be honest, there is no other time in my life that I have felt comfortable, wrapped up in the wisdom and insight produced by these two seemingly contradictory but complementary abstract metaphors of space. Ngugi's "moving the center" and hooks' "working the margin" provide me with the "language" in which to verbalize my feelings/thoughts/experiences that consequently enable me to locate my speech.

My whole life has been characterized by a move towards the "center." All my efforts and energies have been directed at trying to gain acceptance and recognition at the "center" even though there all the indications that I belong to the "margin." The journey to the center began that "fateful" Monday morning 26 years ago when I made a mistake of having myself enrolled to standard one class even though I was supposed to be in nursery school like the rest of my age-mates. I remember the excitement I felt the night before that, finally, I would not be the only one left at home while my brothers and sisters

wisdom.

left for school. I too would be sharing the exciting and not too exciting stories about school around the evening fire. What nobody told me was that there was a difference between where we used to go for Sunday school and the nursery school -- which were actually in two different directions. I ended up in Sunday school which happened to have been the standard one class on weekdays. Today, 26 years later, I have come to realize that I'm not anywhere near the end of my journey and, in fact, Ngugi (1993) helps me to understand that the center I have been pursuing all these years need not be *the* only center. There can be many centers, and what I should do is to re-trace my steps to bell hooks' margin and create a space from which I can speak.

The journey towards the center has been long and arduous. It is a journey that has been anything but smooth: the paths were ragged as a result of the continuous usage by those ahead of us without many repairs. There were boulders along the way which we had to jump over or just meander around. However, re-tracing myself to the margin is even harder, tougher/rougher and this is maybe what (Khamasi, 1997) refers to as the trails/trials of walking the maze:

> becoming a teacher educator in a different socio-political setting and in a continent which reflect a different culture from my own, i [wish to] tread cautiously lest i mis-read the decades that have un/folded, the histories that speak, the frustrations that have sedimented, metamorphosed, and ignited in thoughts, stories, theories, and praxis. (Khamasi, 1997, p. 6)

It will be difficult if not impossible for me to walk those ragged paths without getting scarred/scared and haunted by the shadows of empiricism, especially where scholars and researchers believed they had the cure to all our problems. This raggedness speaks of the afflictions of an inherited colonial system of education whose planners not only ignored peoples' cultures when designing the educational programs, but also designed policies to

wipe out peoples' socio-cultural lived experiences. Over three decades "after Independence" the Kenyan education system is still haunted and scarred by those policies (Khamasi, 1997).

What is necessary for me then in this study is to find a space from which to speak – a space that I can speak about my lived experience. A space in which I will not only dwell on my own lived experiences but also use the lived experiences of others in a way that their voices will not be stifled and reduced by my interpretation. A space where lived experiences will be a catalyst for change in the education landscape. It also means finding a space in a changing world where physical margins are constantly changing and the centers are constantly shifting. It is making the margin my center.

Creating a Center at the Margin in Education Research

In education literature, geographical metaphors are increasingly being used to describe the spaces from which people speak and to show the shifting paradigms in education research. Smith (1996) talks about locating a place on a changing educational landscape, where the foundations, the bedrock are being questioned and challenged and the topography is being re-configured and re-textured. Ethical and political questions have been raised, such as: whose interests the particular research projects and methods are serving? (e.g., Lather, 1986); who is speaking for whom? (e.g., Alcoff, 1991-92); what responsibility does the researcher have to the participants of their studies? (e.g., Roman and Apple, 1990); what are the best ways to describe the experiences of "Others"? (e.g., Lincoln & Denzin, 1994) and so on. Sources of these challenges are varied: from critical theory, to feminism, post-structuralism, semiotics and

language/literary studies, hermeneutics and phenomenology. Smith (1996) further argues that research accounts are intentional creations and that interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study. Questioning the authority of the text also means rejecting traditional notions of validity, reliability and generalizability (Lather, 1994; 1986). All this questioning and re-thinking means a constant texturing and re-texturing of the terrain in education research which opens possibilities.

Khamasi (1997) talks about dwelling in/between the tectonic spaces. She describes tectonic as those moments along her *safari* that were "tension-filled spurs which brought pain and feelings of helplessness" (p.10).

> Those emotional clashes – being torn between this idea, that decision, and that action; having an idea, but the atmosphere being so tensed-up that i was afraid to share it; being called to share but, holding back my views, sharing and the ideas shared becoming support for a major decision, consequently easing some tension. (Khamasi, 1997, p.10)

For Khamasi, the *safari* was not always emotionally smooth. There were those feelings she refers to as "those spaces between comfortable and uncomfortable, between desire and fear" (p. 10).

> The **bending, warping, and breaking** are the painful, dreadful, loving desirable, and admirable experiences. These experiences come in moments, reminding me that student teaching and school advising is about landscaping someone else's terrain. (Khamasi, 1997, p. 10)

Like Khamasi, I too occupy those tectonic spaces, which represent painful and joyful moments. Those painful moments I realize are those that I try to work at the center. A center that sometimes does not recognize me or even acknowledge my existence. Those are the times in my graduate school that I found the space had been taken...this is when a fellow student gives a presentation that ESL is equivalent to being "unsmart"... and reminding me painfully that my two children belong to that class--- they are labeled.

These are the times when a fellow student decides that the class is too dull/unhuman and suggests that we bring in flowers to decorate the class... painfully reminding me of the many mothers and children in my country working in dehumanizing conditions; the many indigenous trees that have felled to pave way for flowers so that "we at the center" can enjoy the beauty...or like that professor who brings a video to class that criminalizes an important aspect of my traditional culture, reminding me painfully that my mother and my grandmother are again on trial.. Those are the moments I rush/rash out, not knowing really where to go. These are the moments I feel the center is too hot, my emotions build up and explode into tiny debris, these are moments I withdraw from the crowd and tread softly to the margin, which offers a momentary solace. This is the place where I feel "safe," wanting to cool off, ready to continue with the journey: this time, shifting the debris to find if there is a shred I can hold on to.

Locating the Research Site

My fieldwork took place in the eight month period from January to August 1997, in one high school in Murang'a district, Kenya, which is the home of Gikuyu people. This is the district in which I was born and raised. It is also the district where I have spent all my professional life as a teacher and have had many conversations with fellow teachers about the lack of cultural relevance in the curriculum. As an insider in this community, I was allowed some information that only an insider can access. Beside the obvious trust that the community of teachers have for one of their own, there are details of non-verbal communication that an insider would know. For instance, the Gikuyu people like many other ethnic groups in Kenya, particularly the elders, make extensive

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use of proverbs and other special forms of communication. Such forms of communication become even more complex when the problem is sensitive and the focus is on groups (Ahlberg, 1991; Ndunda, 1995). There is also the advantage of partly using Gikuyu as the language of research because there are certain words that attain their full meanings, strength and flavor only if expressed in vernacular (Ndunda, 1995). Body language such as gestures, facial expressions and voice variations are important tools among the Gikuyu people which can only be well understood by people who have grown up in this community (Ahlberg, 1991). Sometimes, laughter that may not be significant to an outsider could indicate subversiveness, disapproval or a cautionary warning to a particular phenomenon.

Beneficiaries of the Study

The study explored the possibility of using local resources which are culturally relevant to meet curriculum goals. It was directed at enhancing the current curriculum requirements, which have little regard for the cultural values of Kenyan people. In the study, teachers explored the rationale for expanding curriculum resources by using culturally relevant local resources. The teacher's experiences and views of the current curriculum resources formed the basis of the inquiry. Once the rationale for change was established, the teachers explored the question of how much change could be accommodated within the existing curriculum boundaries so that curriculum goals could be met. The teachers further explored the innovativeness of their proposed changes in reference to the ones currently in use, the implications to them as teachers (professionals) and as employees of the Ministry of Education. The teachers also explored what the

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proposed changes would mean to the immediate school community and the larger community.

It is anticipated that this study will provide insight into the teacher's perception of the curriculum and how those perceptions can be used with regard to curriculum changes. The findings will contribute to our understanding about teacher education and about ways of involving teachers more actively in curriculum changes. This study is designed with awareness that social science research should benefit the co-researchers. By nurturing a co-researching relationship with teachers and allowing them active participation in knowledge production, there is an obvious acquisition of new knowledge and skills. This acquisition of new knowledge and skills assist the teachers to reflect on their professional practices, thus fostering growth and awareness.

In a more tangible sense, the study is significant in a number of ways. One, it has the potential of reducing rural "exodus." Africa, and particularly Kenya, has in the past three decades experienced massive rural-urban migration. This problem and the consequent problems associated with rural-urban migration such as loss of human resources, brain-drain and so forth have been recognized and acknowledged by academics and policy makers (Government of Kenya, 1974-1978; Ndegwa, 1988). However, this problem is often addressed through slogans and "cosmetic" changes which often fail to get to the root. Some of the reasons for the rural-urban migration stem from the fact that curriculum in the present context prepares graduates for "white collar" jobs which are only found in the urban areas. The curriculum also portrays the rural areas as being backward and lacking the social amenities of "civilized living" (Maina, 1995). This creates a barrier between the children and their natural environment. This study has the

potential of breaking the cultural barrier between the children and their communities. The children will begin to see the knowledge and values they bring from home as a valuable and important component to their learning. By so doing, the children will begin to identify their role in the community and want to assume personal responsibility in its development.

The study also has the potential of validating local cultural values which will make the children see the possibility of creating employment in the community by using local knowledge, wisdom and skills. By extension, those who proceed further in academic studies will want to return home to their communities to communicate selectively their knowledge and skills in a way that is of use to the community.

Another significance of this study is its potential to cut educational costs. One of the reasons education enrolment in Africa has stagnated, and in some countries has declined, is because of the high cost of education (World Bank, 1995). Many parents in Kenya are finding it increasingly difficult to enroll their children in schools because of the "high costs of learning materials, text books in particular" (UNICEF, 1989, p. 104). It should be noted that the regions of Kenya where general enrolment is low also happen to be regions that are generally poor (UNICEF, 1989). This study ensures efficient use of locally available resources. By using local knowledge and resources to enrich the curriculum, the money which is spent on "externally packaged knowledge" such as textbooks, can be used to develop other areas of education, which will ultimately lower the general costs. This means that more parents will be able to afford to send their children to school.

Overview of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 has provided a synopsis of the framework and rationale for the study, which is the basis for the structure and the questions of the research. **Chapter 2** puts the study in a social historical context. **Chapter 3** gives an overview of interpretive methodologies that informed the study, and describes the methods used to generate data. **Chapter 4** is an encounter with teachers' conversations to reveal their experiences, perceptions and thoughts for now and future. **Chapter 5** is a condensed documentation of what the teachers were able to accomplish in their own classroom projects after they took action and, finally, **Chapter 6** highlights the implications of the study to the study of curriculum, teachers in particular and to the teaching profession in general.

CHAPTER 2

EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND CULTURE

Most societies of the world strive to transmit their culture and worldview to succeeding generations through education. They ensure that the socialization of children through education shapes all aspects of identity, instilling knowledge of the groups' language, history, traditions and spirituals beliefs (Barman, 1987; Bishop, 1985; Lawton, 1975). The idea of transmitting culture to the youth through education concurs with the way some educators think and talk about curriculum. Dennis Lawton says that curriculum is "essentially a selection from the culture of a society" (1975, p.6). Lawton's notion of curriculum as a selection from the culture implies that curriculum has the function of promoting the acquisition and mastery of the core values of the society for which it is structured (Omulando, 1992).

Lawton's point of view resonates with that of Julius Nyerere, former president of Tanzania, when he states that the purpose of education is

> to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the society, and to prepare the young people for their future membership of the society and their active participation in its maintenance or development. (Nyerere, cited in Bishop, 1985, p.55)

The cultural heritage, the knowledge and wisdom accumulated by any society over the years, provides an important source for decisions such as what is to be included in the curriculum. Thus, curriculum, as an instrument of society for educating the young, naturally reflects the ideals and values, the knowledge and skills, the attitudes deemed significant by that society which will consequently develop a strong cultural identity (Bishop, 1985).

Making Curriculum

When educators talk and think about curriculum making, they begin by understanding the ideals of the society for which the curriculum is being made. This includes understanding the values of the society and the characteristics that are desired for the said society. In other words, what kind of individual does the society desire the education to produce? What kind of skills, values and attitudes will the individual possess as a result of education? Understanding these ideals is often referred to as education aims, which have been described as "something desirable for people in general that is only possible for them to have because of something they learn" (Walker, 1986, p.2). It means for curriculum makers envisioning desirable states for individuals and societies that seem approachable or achievable.

For education aims to be approachable and achievable, there are many stakeholders including parents, teachers and community members. This is because in achieving certain aims, what is taught is just as important as how it is taught. Making curriculum is the ability to make the practice of teaching "intelligent and sensitive, responsible and moral" (Walker, 1986, p.3). Developing education aims is often done by various individuals: philosophers defining, justifying and reasoning aims, curriculum specialists, teachers and administrators stating aims and seeking ways to reach them. It is however worthwhile to briefly discuss the ideas of philosophers, Plato (c.428-328 B.C), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788), John Dewey (1859-1952), whose ideas about education have had a profound effect on educational thought and practice in Western civilization to which we have in one way or the other subscribed (Walker, 1986, p.4).

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Plato thought about producing a "just state," a just state where there would be fair treatment of each individual according to nature. In an ideal city-state, Plato argued, the rulers would be drawn from the most intelligent so that they would be fair and wise in their treatment of all individuals. The brave and strong would become soldiers to protect the citizens in times of threat. Then there are those whose talent lies in the provision of goods and services, who should therefore devote their lives to these needed tasks in society. Plato also argued that individuals are in a way like society. Individuals thrive when their different parts function in a balanced and harmonious way. The ancient Greeks believed that human beings had bodies that were animated and driven by a three-part psyche or soul. Each psyche had an appetitive part which expressed desires and needs sought their fulfillment; a spirited part, which put aside unnecessary needs in the interest of self-protection and survival and a rational part, which rose above both appetite and physical action to provide good judgement through reason. Keeping these three parts in balance was Plato's ideal of the good person, and balancing the three major functions of the citizenry was his ideal of the just state (Walker, 1986).

Plato realized however that individuals were born with different temperaments, capacities and intellectual endowments. In some, the appetitive part of their psyche was dominant, in others, the spirited part and, in still others, the rational part. Why not, he reasoned, create an educational system that would recognize these individual differences, train the dominant part of a person's psyche and thereby fulfill the needs of a just society for a balanced order. Those with predominantly appetitive psyches would be educated to satisfy their own needs and needs of others by becoming farmers, builders, shopkeepers and the like. The highly spirited would be educated in the martial arts and become the

soldiers and policemen who would unselfishly ensure internal order and courageously protect all against external threat. And those with predominantly rational psyches would become, after considerable intellectual and philosophical training, the wise lawmakers, reasonable judges, and supreme leaders of the state. Thus, Plato aimed at an ideal, well ordered and well balanced society through education of its members to fulfil the roles needed for such a society to function smoothly (Walker, 1986).

Jacques Rousseau looked at the corrupt society of his time and declared that "all things are good as they come out of the hands of their creator, but degenerate in the hands of man" (Walker, 1986, p.5). He saw the unrestricted influence education has on individuals, making them conform to their view of what a socialized and educated person should be like and robbing individuals of their true identity. Rousseau wrote *Emile*, an idealistic version of the kind of education he believed was needed to bring about the development of a free individual. The early education of Emile up to age twelve was based upon learning from experience and not from books, learning from nature and not from adults. After Emile was twelve, and had developed his body and senses, his education turned to other areas. With the help of his tutor, he was able to see that all he had become through the freedom of his own development had enabled him to become a person like the others. From this recognition of personhood, Emile developed a sense of the value of others and deep human feelings of sympathy and responsibility towards them. Emile was ready to become a free, responsible, educated member of the society. Rousseau's vision was of the unique worth of the individual and the need for freedom in education to achieve individuality and personhood (Walker, 1986).

Plato and Rousseau's ideas about education aims, though seemingly contradictory, have influenced the way educators think and talk about curriculum up to today. Dewey believed that the schools could serve both aims without either submerging individual development in social needs or providing for individual freedom at the expense of social balance and harmony. He thought Plato had been right in recognizing individual differences and the importance of cooperative effort in the society, but he criticized Plato for narrowly conceiving individual differences and talents as being of only three kinds: a class of workers, soldiers and leaders. Dewey also appreciated Rousseau's recognition of the importance of individuality and of freedom and experience in learning but criticized Rousseau for not recognizing the importance of the social dimension of learning. Our natural capacities, Dewey argued, are called forth and developed in interaction with others and this is essential for human growth and development. Democracy, Dewey argued, was not just a form of government, it was a way of people's living and working together that provided for freedom of interaction among groups and for the widest possible sharing of experiences, interests and values. This in turn provided each person with a supportive and nurturing social environment in which to grow and develop as an individual. The ideal school for Dewey was the one that took the form of an "embryonic social community," one in which students were encouraged to cooperate and work together and learn from each other as well as from their teachers (Walker, 1986). Plato, Rousseau and Dewey's way of thinking about education aims has been criticized and supported by various educators and academics. What is important though is that they have provided the foundations on which education aims are built.

As Plato and Rousseau's ideas indicate, curriculum has the function of envisioning desirable states for individuals and societies that seems approachable and achievable in an intelligent, sensitive, responsible and moral way (Walker, 1986). And as Lawton (1975) argues,

> certain aspects of our way of life, certain kinds of knowledge, certain attitudes and values are regarded as so important that their transmission to the next generation is not left to chance, in our society but is entrusted to specially trained professional (teachers) in elaborate and expensive institutions (schools). (p.6)

In short, curriculum molds individuals with the characteristics deemed ideal by the society for which it is developed. The cultural heritage, the knowledge and wisdom accumulated over the years, provides the core of the decisions that are made about curriculum. Thus, curriculum as an instrument of society for socializing the youth naturally reflects the ideals and values, the knowledge and skills, the attitudes deemed significant by that society which will consequently develop a strong cultural identity. This is important because research has shown that a strong cultural identity enables individuals to become independent and self-reliant people who are functional in their own environment. Recent literature on education has also shown that cultural values are central components in curriculum making as they directly affect the expected level of skills to be imparted for the political, economic and social survival of a society (Kirkness, 1992). In a curriculum that puts the cultural values of the society into consideration, concepts such as self-reliance and independence are highly encouraged. Also, a sense of belonging is cultivated through the communal activities of the society and direct democracy is provided in a conducive environment.

Making Curriculum for Kenyan Schools

In the republic of Kenya, the idea of "selecting from the culture" of Kenyan peoples in making curriculum has been acknowledged and documented by various educators, academics and policy makers. As early as 1909, Professor J. Nelson Fraser, the Educational Advisor to the Government of British East Africa noted the "talent available among Africans and stressed the need to use this talent particularly by giving technical education" (Omulando, 1992, p.254). This principle fitted in with the views of the settlers who found it relatively cheaper to use African skilled labour. Following closely with Fraser's concept was the Phelp-Stokes commission of 1924 which emphasized the need to "adapt the curriculum and teaching to African conditions" as well as to increase "participation of the natives in the decision making process regarding African education" (Omulando, 1992, p.255). In 1925, the Colonial Office White Paper indicated the "urgent need to educate the [Africans for their] environment and greater government involvement emphasizing education for rural development" (Omulando, 1992, p.256). A.L. Binns at a conference held in Cambridge in 1952 stressed that there was need to Africanize teacher training institutions through "hiring more African instructors and fitting the curriculum more closely to the practical realities of the African environment" (Omulando, 1992, p.259). It is worthwhile to note at this point that the reports and commissions that made these recommendations had no interest of the African at heart; instead much of it lay in the paternalistic thinking in Europe regarding the ability of the African to attain an education. This way of thinking is exemplified in the 1926 Department of Education Annual Report, which asserted that:

> Generally speaking, the African mind in Kenya has reached the stage of
> sense perception. The imagination and the emotions are highly developed,
> but the development of the reasoning faculties must be slow. Just as
> handiwork has been found useful in the training of mentally defective

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children, so, the most useful training, which the African can receive in his present condition, is continual contact with material processes. (Cited in Omulando, 1992, p.257)

It is no wonder then that the Ominde commission (1964), the first in post-independent Kenya, proposed that "the schools must respect the cultural traditions of the peoples of Kenya, both as expressed in social institutions and relationships" (1964, p.25). A few years later in 1971, the Kenya Curriculum Mission under the chairmanship of Gordon S. Bessey pointed out that:

> The curriculum laid emphasis on rote learning. It neglected practical and creative activities, especially in such fields as agriculture and basic manual skills. And it was indifferent to Kenya's cultural heritage and the entire environment in which children as young people grow. (Omulando, 1992, p.262)

Professor C.B. Mackay (1981), chairing the Presidential Working Party, recommended an overhaul of the education structure to remove undue emphasis on exam-centred education giving schools opportunities to promote vocational development as well as the cultural aspects of the curriculum. Mackay stressed the need for education to "foster, develop and communicate the rich and varied cultures of Kenya" (1981, p.7).

Why has one educator after the other, spread across the century, emphasized the importance of selecting from the culture of the Kenyan people in making curriculum? The reasons for this are many and diverse. However, in general, literature on education, particularly in societies that have suffered colonial domination in the past, has shown that schools that respect and support a child's culture demonstrate significantly better outcomes in educating those children (Billings, 1995; Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995; McCaleb, 1994). And classroom approaches that are responsive to the child's culture promote academic achievement by providing cultural relevance and a rationale for accepting school

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(Archibald, 1995; Kirkness, 1992). Recent literature in education has also indicated that cultural relevance in curriculum is central to identity formation (Dawson, 1988; Jordan, 1986), provides survival skills (Couture, 1978; Longboat, 1987), encourages self-determination (Mackay, 1987) and is a means of achieving education equality (More, 1992).

A study done by Professor Fafunwa at the University of Ife in Nigeria, using Yoruba (a local language) as a medium of instruction in the full primary course, succeeded in making science and mathematics more meaningful to the pupils. A comparative study showed that the pupils involved gained admission into secondary schools in slightly larger numbers than did the conventional schools. Science for pupils became "realistic, functional and applicable to their everyday experiences" (Alabi, 1978, 108, cited in Bogonko, 1992, p.249). A curriculum must be designed in the light of the major trends and development within society and it must also reflect the major social and cultural needs of the society. An educational system goes astray when it has no relevance to the culture of the society for which it is developed (Bishop, 1986).

For instance, Eber Hampton (1995), in reference to First Nations people in Canada, argues that Western education is in content and structure hostile to Native people:

> It must be straightforwardly realized that education as currently practiced is cultural genocide. It seeks to brainwash the Native child, substituting non-Native for Native knowledge, values and identity. (p.35)

Interpreted for Kenyan children, it would mean that curriculum which is presented from a Western education view does not help the children to understand who they are as a people. Instead, such a curriculum has been used to "mystify and obscure reality" (Ngugi, 1983, p.92). It is a curriculum that "want us to imbibe a culture that inculcates in us the value of self-doubt, self-denigration, in a word, a slave consciousness" (Ngugi,

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1983, p.92). The consequences of what Hampton describes above concurs with Frantz Fanon's description of the process of creating a colonial elite in Africa:

> They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture; they stuffed their mouths full of high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to their teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. (cited in Ngugi, 1983, p.80)

This is not to say that First Nations or Kenyan children should not be exposed to other cultures or that there is no great value in knowing another's world, only that the structure is alien and hostile, not in intent, but in the assumption that it is *the* only way things can be done.

In a study done by the Ontario government (1989) on First Nation school dropouts, it was found that some dropouts rejected courses in Native studies, either because the perspective adopted, the content or teachers did not live up to their expectations. One dropout dismissed Native studies as "just another history course for White kids" (p.151). The study confirmed that in some schools, Native courses are taught by non-Native teachers with no specific training and little understanding or sympathy with the Native perspective. Hence, the courses simply become a cursory history of North American Native people from a somewhat novel perspective that does little to help Native students understand their background or the issues that face them as people today. This way of teaching a people's history from a somewhat novel perspective has been criticized by a curriculum panel in Tanzania, after finding out that the existing history curriculum for primary Std. V through Std. VII was about tribes, explorations, civilizations and "a history of Africans being acted upon by foreigners" (Bogonko, 1992, p.277). It was not a history of the inhabitants of the area. There was nothing in it to

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indicate to the pupils that they were a member of a nation. This kind of history could not "awaken in primary pupils national pride" (Bogonko, 1992, p.277).

R. Common (1988) argues that there is a mismatch between educational objectives of a school system based in one culture and the way of life, values and goals of students attending it, who come from a different cultural background. When students are evaluated with instruments developed and normed for children from the mainstream education, then the student is faced with the prospect of being evaluated not on the basis of his or her capabilities, but on the extent to which he or she has acculturated. Interpreted for Kenyan students, it would mean that the instruments used for evaluation are hostile to their culture and not appropriate. In Kenya, for instance, the child who succeeds in schooling is the one who has completely cut links with the way of life of the community and who is consequently well rewarded by the society with a "good" job away from home. The further away from home the better (Maina, 1995). From this analysis, it is clear that curriculum that selects from the culture of the people is important and the consequences of not doing the same are dire. However, the Kenyan curriculum in its present context lacks the capability or even the motivation to do that. The section which follows highlights some issues that need to be addressed before a culturally relevant curriculum can be developed for Kenyan schools.

Making Culturally Relevant Curriculum

Academic and future success depends on the student developing an accurate understanding of their relationship with the Western dominant culture. Educational processes must provide the students with the knowledge of how their cultures interact with

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the complex Western dominant cultures in order to increase their future options. The students will then participate successfully in the society if they chose to do so, while maintaining their cultural identities (Couture, 1978; Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995).

The issues that must be addressed by schools in order to meet these challenges are multiple and complex. An understanding of the historical relationship between their culture and Western education is essential. As Kirkness argues in reference to First Nations education in Canada:

> The First Nations children of today must know their past, their true history, in order to understand the present and plan for the future. First Nations cultures must once again be respected and the traditional values must again be held in high esteem. (1992, p.103)

Educators who fail to help students understand who they are as a people, or even to respect their own culture, results in what Abdou Moumari of the Niger, in a plea for the return to national languages and cultures, refers to:

> Schools which bear no relationship to their surroundings, schools which are cut off from the life of the country and of society, unproductive schools which only train pupils for the civil service, which destroy national cultural values and personality and produce [people] who are foreigners in their own country. (cited in Bishop, 1986, p.6)

For the educators of Kenyan children just like others in developing countries, to develop this understanding is both a challenge and a responsibility. The challenge is to present complex, sensitive material in a way that helps the students to understand the realities of their past and present while maintaining a positive outlook for the future. The responsibility is to help the students discover what role their people and themselves as individuals should play in the future development of their communities, their country and the world.

Another pertinent issue of concern is culture itself. It is necessary to understand the nature of contemporary Kenyan cultures. Although there are many commonalties in

the cultural values and practices of different ethnic groups in Kenya, there are also many differences. It is simplification to speak of Kenyan cultures as a unity because they differ in language, economic and governmental systems, history, traditional customs and religious beliefs. Kenya is basically a multi-ethnic country with three major ethno-linguistic groups comprised of over forty-two smaller homogenous communities of people who are distinctly aware of their cultural and linguistic identities.

In addition to the cultural and linguistic differences between the Kenyan peoples, cultures are dynamic and continuously evolving (Hamme, 1996; Hampton, 1995). Cultural beliefs and practices are continuously being re-shaped through changing environmental circumstances and interactions with other cultures. There are those members within a group who have maintained a traditional way of life, while others have completely adapted to the Western dominant cultures. Most people function within these two extremes but all of them have been affected in one way or the other by the Western dominant culture. Most Kenyans have forged a cultural identity that enables them to function in both cultures.

From this perspective, it is difficult to conceptualize the meaning of culture without falling into the danger of rejecting the "artifacts of other cultures" or seemingly attempting to "turn back" the clock (Hampton, 1995, p.29). Schools have the responsibility of validating both traditional and contemporary cultures of their students because, as Goodland (1984) argues, "schools mirror the surrounding society and many people want to be sure that they continue to do so" (cited in Pinar, 1995, p.243). As Ngugi (1986) argues, we should re-orient ourselves towards placing our cultures in the center so that other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their

contributions towards understanding ourselves. This would mean that the students are first exposed to their physical and cultural environment as the "mirror in which to observe themselves in relation to the outside world" (Ngugi, 1986, p.89). It becomes problematic when some cultures are presented in the classroom as static and unaffected by time. As one Nisga'a elder in reference to First Nations education in Canada said, "there was a lot more to our culture than just some "mickey-mouse" courses in moccasin making" (Merkel, 1984, p.1). Or in reference to the same education, Hampton argues:

> Asking Natives to eschew automobiles, television and bank accounts in the name of "preserving their culture" makes as much sense as asking Whites to give up gunpowder because it was invented by the Chinese or the zero because it was invented by the Arabs. It is the continuity of a living culture that is important to an Indian education, not the preservation of a frozen museum specimen. (1995, p.29)

What the school should do is to select carefully those aspects of traditional education that were vital to the survival of their societies, recognize and support them in the classroom in order to develop the sense of pride that is critical to personal and cultural identity. It is important to respect both the historical and contemporary aspects of a child's culture, validate the realities of the world in which the child lives by recognizing its existence, and using educational methods that build on the cultural strengths and demonstrate how those strengths can be used to benefit the individual and the country. Finally, educators must identify educational strategies that most effectively build on children's cultural identity while providing the necessary survival skills for participation in the complex modern society.

HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIPS

Indigenous African curriculum

Long before the Europeans arrived in Kenya in 1844, Kenya had an education system. This was indigenous African education, the main aim of which was to transmit and conserve from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of the family, clan and ethnic group. It also aimed at providing survival skills to the children. Since environment and modes of livelihood differ from place to place in Kenya, indigenous education acclimatized children to their relevant area. The Maasai and related pastoral groups, for example, were adapted to the ecology of the grasslands and to the economy related to livestock raising. The Agikuyu and other Bantu mixed farmers on the other hand were made knowledgeable about the physical elements pertinent to their livelihood. African indigenous education ensured that the children knew that the future of their community depended on the understanding and perpetuation of ethnic institutions, laws, language, and values handed down to them from their ancestors. It also inculcated in them a diligent sharing of common tasks of their group. For the physical survival of the community, it was imperative that labor was divided among all members. This collective responsibility was the philosophy underlying indigenous African education (Bogonko, 1992).

Content

The content of African indigenous education grew out of the physical and social situations of any ethnic group. Because of the diverse climatic conditions and environment including mountains, valleys, plains, rivers, lakes, grasslands and forests, each child had to learn how to use their conditions fruitfully as well as avert its dangers. The children had to learn the

weather of the area they inhabited as this governed the nature of economic undertakings. Names of trees, plants and grasses and names of animals, snakes and insects as well as the use and dangers were learnt by all children within their respective roles (Bogonko, 1992).

To facilitate the work condition, some implements and tools were required. Manufacturing the implements in some communities was left to certain clans or families who handed this knowledge from one generation to the next through apprenticeship. Although many useful tools used in daily activities such as weaving baskets, ropes, pottery were taught to everybody, some more complex tools such as spears, axes and hoes were left to specialists. Other specialities included the making of musical instruments such as flutes, harps, trumpets and so forth. These were some of the areas where formal instruction and training were undertaken (Bogonko, 1992).

Socially, the child was taught to value the society's norms. They were initiated to conform to the manners and laws of the group. The child was taught decency of speech and behaviour as expected by the family, clan and the community. These lessons were learnt through an elaborate system of group avoidances, prohibitions and permissions, a strict code of morality enforced by the parents and community members as well as gods. This is because the conduct was for the collective not individual interest. These elements of morality were taught to help the children to understand the nature of society they would be operating in. The laws governing the ethnic group became written in the mind and heart of the African child and became part of all thinking and feeling (Bogonko, 1992).

Intellectual education about the clan and group history, philosophy of life, law and custom and the development of reasoning were often taught in the integrated daily life. Songs and stories were used to recall the feats of the clan heroes who had made the physical

survival of the group possible. All aspects of language were learnt through narratives, community discussions, legends, poems, songs, lullabies and stories. Abstract thought was also evoked through riddles, sayings, folktales and the analysis of various problems. Various games also involved arithmetic, combinations, geometry, the property of numerals and the agility of the eye, which developed the intellect (Bogonko, 1992).

All in all, the content selected to be taught to the youth reflected every aspect of life and culture. The younger generation was given knowledge to make those adjustments, which the experience of the past had proved durable. Stories and songs for example taught history and origins of the group. Some carried moral lessons and gave answers to questions regarding the universe, animal behaviour or the existence of a certain phenomena in the community. Such content enabled the children to understand their culture and the environment surrounding them, how to act on it and live in a cohesive community (Bogonko, 1992).

Teaching Strategies

The approach to the education of the child in the indigenous educational setting was on a communal basis (Omulando & Shiundu, 1992, p.15). The parent of the child acted as the first teachers, but gradually these responsibilities shifted to other family members and eventually to the entire community (Omulando & Shiundu, 1992, p.15). The idea of having parents as the primary educators of the child concurs with some recent literature on parental involvement in education (Bishop, 1985; McCaleb, 1994; McCaskill, 1987). Parents are increasingly being recognised in the teaching profession as the primary educators of the child. In reference to aboriginal education in Canada, McCaskill argues that parental

involvement is a way of living for aboriginal children with the learning process starting from the home (1987, p. 169):

> Parental involvement in the school is not superficial; it is deliberately in-depth process of total commitment of the parents to the students and community. (McCaskill, 1987, p.169)

The methods of teaching took many forms, again depending on the age of the children. At an early age, children were encouraged to learn through play (Sifuna, 1990, p.7) which could be referred to as the sensori-motor stage according to Piaget theory of child development:

> A child who did not participate actively in play was normally suspected of being ill or even abnormal. Children were left to their own initiative to make toys. They made toys from local materials of their own choice and interests. They moulded from mud and clay and made use of articles, which were of little use to adults. (Sifuna, 1990, p.7)

Through play, the children imitated the adult world in a creative and symbolic way. They often imitated their parents and other grown-ups activities, which they would pursue at a later stage (Sifuna, 1990).

Besides learning through play, other teaching methods such as story telling were often used. The children now had the mental capability of understanding the abstract and applying that understanding to their own lives. This stage could be a combination of pre-operation/pre-conceptual stages with the concrete operations of Piaget theory. Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes one of his earliest learning experiences at this stage as follows:

> I can vividly recall those evenings of story telling around the fireside. It was mostly the grown-ups telling the stories but everybody was interested and involved. We children would re-tell the stories the following day to other children. (1986, p.10)

The children were encouraged to listen carefully to the storyteller by making them active participants. A good storyteller used various techniques of body language, dramatic

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dialogue, and voice variation to make the story lively and enjoyable. Meanwhile, the children learned to value words for their meanings and nuances. This kind of learning was later reinforced by the language games the children often played such as "riddles, proverbs, tongue twisters, transposition of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words" (Ngugi, 1986, p.11).

> So we learnt the music of our language on top of the content. The language, through images and symbols, gave us the view of the world, but it had a beauty of its own. (Ngugi, 1986, p.11)

Another approach to teaching in the indigenous education setting was through apprenticeship (Omulando, 1992, p.15). Some children within the community were expected to assume special responsibilities such as being smiths, sages, seers, herbalists, and midwives and so forth, which required special training. The children to undertake such training were designated at birth to inherit the knowledge from a close relative who had been bestowed by the creator with that particular knowledge (Sifuna, 1990, p.9). The apprentices learned by observation. They usually lived with the instructor to learn on the job (Sifuna, 1990, p.9). Learning through apprenticeship was a life long process. Though the learners performed some duties in the presence of the instructors when they were thought to be "knowledgeable and proficient" (Sifuna, 1990, p.9), they only performed independently once the instructor retired due to old age, got incapacitated or died.

Formal education was manifested in initiation ceremonies, which marked the transition from childhood to adulthood and often consisted of circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls in some communities. Initiation ceremonies and the rituals accompanying them were sacred institutions, which prepared people for active life in the community. Those participating in the rites were taught the duties, rights and obligations of

manhood and womanhood. The physical act of initiation encouraged bravery, which was highly valued for the survival of the community at the same time; it bound the initiates to their ancestors through the shedding of blood. During this time when the initiates were physically removed from the community, they were formally trained to assume responsibility in the community, to protect their territory by learning the history of their traditional enemies. They were also taught responsible sex behaviour because they would be expected to marry soon after, procreate and ensure the continuity of the group (Bogonko, 1992).

In summary, African indigenous education can be described as a process that "reflected gradual and progressive achievement in conformity with successive stages of physical, emotional and mental development of the child" (Omulando, 1992, p.14). The purpose of education was clear and firmly based on some philosophical foundation. All what was learnt was geared towards producing individuals with a strong cultural identity. It was a kind of education that produced individuals with a high degree of social integrity and a society that would possibly be described as "secure, efficient, enlightened, peaceful and tolerant in its dealings, honourable in its affairs, strong and loyal to its values and obligations, and rich in the diverse forms of cultural expression and spiritual fulfilment" (Merkel, 1984, p.5). It is, however, important to note that none of these aspects of culture are static. To assume that Kenyan people can live in such a society would be refusing to acknowledge the harsher realities of their modern existence. Cultural patterns are continuously changing and evolving over long periods of time and particularly so for Kenyan people who have had to contend with the colonial coercive practices as well as hegemonic institutions.

British Colonial and Kenyan Post-Colonial Curriculum

But then came colonisation by the British rule. Things changed and in many respects for the worse. When formal institutions of instruction were first established, the nature and function of education changed dramatically. Formal education imposed British values, beliefs and customs in order to "civilize" the Kenyans and provide them with skills necessary for the "survival of the colony" (Leakey, 1954, p. 130). Thus, the formal education became an agent of assimilation and subordination.

Content

The missionaries, who first established formal institutions, were mainly concerned with spreading Christianity, saving the souls of the 'heathens' and bringing them to Christ. They also felt obliged to serve humankind by bringing western civilization to the 'primitive' people of Kenya (Sherfield, 1973, p. 9). With such goals and objectives, the missionaries embarked on developing a curriculum that would serve their own interests. The content was the word of God written and disseminated in the language of the missionaries. Literacy skills were limited to the reading of the bible, with the aim of converting a few Kenyans who would then assist in spreading the gospel as "interpreters, and priests" (Eshiwani, 1993, p. 15).

The education offered by the colonial government was stratified along racial lines with "Europeans at the top, Asians in the middle and Africans at the bottom " (Stabler, 1969, p.7). For a country that had hoped to make Kenya its "home" (Leakey, 1954), it seems that British colonial educational curriculum was determined both by class and

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race. The stratification may have originated from the Platonian philosophy of education which purports that in producing a just society, the rulers would be drawn from the most intelligent so that they would be fair in their treatment of all individuals (Walker, 1986). Surmise it to say that the Europeans assumed they were the most intelligent and the obvious rulers while the less intelligent Africans would provide the manual skilled labor.

Each of the three groups (Europeans, Asians, Africans) received knowledge that would make them maintain the status quo in a process that Peter McLaren refers to as hegemony, "the role of the superstructure in perpetuating class divisions and preventing the development of class consciousness" (1989, p.173). Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by the sheer exercise of force,

> but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the school, the mass media, the political system and the family. (McLaren, 1989, p.173)

The school as a site of perpetuating hegemony is well exemplified by Jean Anyon in a study of social class and school knowledge in United States (1981). In a study of knowledge produced in a working class school, she found that students in this school were not taught their history (1981, p.32):

> Nor were these students taught to value the interests, which they share with others who will be workers. What little social information they were exposed to appears to provide little or no conceptual or critical understanding of the world or their situation in the world. (Anyon, 1981, p.32)

The kind of knowledge reproduced in working class schools according to Anyon (1981) resonates with Ngugi's description of colonial education where he points out that colonized people are taught that they have no history. History started after the coming of the Europeans. For instance I remember my primary school history when teacher after teacher repeated like a "gospel truth" that the "first man" to see Mt. Kenya, the largest mountain in

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Kenya, was a Dr. Krapf, and the "first man" to see Lake Victoria was a John Hannington Speck. Note that these two discoveries were made in the mid-19th century. In all truth and honesty and with all due fairness these two physical features were part and parcel of the communities that lived near them as recorded in the oral traditions and community folklore.

Mt. Kenya for instance was the worshipping place for the Gikuyu community because it is the place where the original Gikuyu man and woman were supposedly created. Lake Victoria too served a variety of purposes to the Luo people, mainly as a source of food, fishing, and clean water. To say that these two gentlemen, Dr. Krapf and John Hannington Speck, were the first men to see these two conspicuous physical features is to imply that the communities which had lived in these areas for hundreds if not thousands of years were not "men" or, like a Canadian classmate recently told me in a light touch, "they were all blind"! Such knowledge was used in the classroom to show the superiority of a race that had the ability to name the world for the other. Note that Mt. Kenya is locally known as Kirinyaga, and Lake Victoria as Kavirondo. This sense of superiority for one race and the consequent inferiority of the other race are presented as "the" objective fact in order to perpetuate the status quo. Being taught history this way was no accident. It was a well-calculated move in which a generation of people would be taught that they have no history (Ngugi, 1983). Trevor Roper said that there was only darkness in Africa, and as darkness was no subject for history, Africa had therefore no history prior to colonial conquest. Hegel called it land of darkness and perpetual childhood (Ngugi, 1983). Denying that people had a history has one aim: to show that the colonised like animals had merely adapted themselves to nature and had made no attempt to put a human stamp on their natural environment. Hence they "were really savages" (Ngugi, 1983, p.93).

The colonial education system denies that the colonized have real human languages. Their languages are described as vernaculars meaning the "language of the slaves or merely barbaric tongues" (Ngugi, 1983, p.94). My earliest recollection of the attack on my language was when I was 10 years old and in Std. 4. It was a school rule that we had to communicate in the English language Std. 4 onwards. One of the most humiliating experiences was to be caught speaking Gikuyu in the vicinity of the school. We were given corporal punishment, several canes depending on the number of times a person had been caught speaking. Sometimes we were made to carry a log of wood or a stone heavy enough to make us unable to play during recess. Sometimes we were asked to bring money that we could hardly afford. And sometimes, our hair was cut in patches.

How the speakers of Gikuyu were caught depended on the innovativeness of the individual teachers. Some teachers kept spies from Std. 1-3 who could intermingle with the older students during recess and report them later to the teacher. (My 9-year-old son was recently (1997) recruited as a spy in the school he attended briefly when I was doing my research). Other teachers used a button or a small piece of wood popularly known as the monitor, which was initially given to one pupil who was supposed to hand it over to whoever was caught speaking Gikuyu. Other teachers made the culprit carry a rotten stinking bone so that the stench would drive other pupils away. Whoever had the monitor at the end of the day would sing who had given it to him and the ensuing process would bring out all the culprits of the day, who would be punished accordingly. Thus, as children, we were turned into witch hunters and in the process we were being taught the lucrative value of being a traitor to one's immediate community (Ngugi, 1983).

Denying us as children to use our language has one aim. To make us despise our language, hence the values carried by that language, and by implication despise ourselves and the people who spoke a language, which now was the cause of our daily humiliation and corporal punishment. By the same token, we would admire the English language and the values carried by that language and the people who evolve the language of our daily rewards and praise (Ngugi, 1983). It is quite common to hear some "educated" people in Kenya proudly brag of how they cannot complete a full sentence in Gikuyu without peppering it with English words.

As president Julius Nyerere in *Education for self-reliance* argues, the purpose of education provided by the colonial government was not designed to prepare the youth for the service of their own country. Instead, it was motivated by a desire to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals for the service of the colonial state (cited in Bishop, 1985, p.237). Nyerere's argument is similar to that of Walter Rodney who says the following about colonial education:

> It [colonial education] was not an educational system that grew out of the African environment, or one that was designed to promote the rational use of material and social resource. It was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African society, but one which sought to instill a sense of deference towards all that was European and capitalist. (cited in Cheru, 1987, p. 18)

As noted from the above description, it is clear colonial education in Kenya was not only segregative, but also exploitative. However, it would be wrong to assume that the African Kenyans passively accepted colonial education without registering some form of resistance. Eshiwani (1993) points out that after realizing that the colonial government, under the influence of White settlers, was not ready to change and develop an education

system for the benefit of all races, Kenyans started questioning the existing education system and demanding that it should be made beneficial to them. They wanted an academic education, which could help them develop socially, economically and politically. They were against an education, which emphasized technical and vocational skills at the expense of academic component. Kenyans perceived this as a way of keeping them in an inferior position (Eshiwani, 1993).

Apart from resenting the stratification of colonial education into European, Asian and African in that order of superiority, African Kenyans were also against missionary attacks on their traditional way of life. Missionaries used missions as centres for indoctrinating Africans into devaluing their culture and adopting the European way of life. The demand for appropriate academic education for Africans and the ill feelings towards imposed cultural values became more serious after the second world war (Eshiwani, 1993). The war veterans who travelled abroad increased the pressure on the government to change the education system. When this did not happen, the Africans established their own independent schools, which were for Africans and run by Africans. These schools offered academic education to Africans and incorporated African culture in Christianity (Eshiwani, 1993). The schools registered dissatisfaction with the colonial education and at the same time demonstrated the Africans' ability to organize. This was a threat to the status quo and the schools were to be closed down by the colonial government at the pretext that they were the hot beds of political agitation by 1952. The Africans had to revert to the segregative system, which attacked their cultural institutions in order to thrive.

Teaching Strategies

The process of colonial indoctrination took many forms. Basically, it was through the

explicit curriculum as taught in schools, but more so, in the implicit form through the hidden

curriculum. The teaching strategies in the colonial curriculum naturally assumed the

superiority of the European based on the Darwinian theory of evolution. This theory posits

that the human being is in a state of evolution and while the European has reached a point of

perfection vis-à-vis civilization, all other non-European beings are in the process of

becoming perfect/ civilized. However, this process could be hastened by making the non-

Europeans to "accept his own degradation as an objective fact, a necessary step, it was

argued, if he was to begin the climb to civilization " (Adams, 1988, p. 227). The following is

an "excellent" exam published by one colonial school of Native Indians in America in the

late 19th century and which could be assumed to have been used in other colonies:

Question: To what race do we all belong?
Answer: The human race.

Question: How many classes belong to this race?
Answer: There are five large classes belonging to the human race.

Question: Which are the first?
Answer: The white people are the strongest.

Question: Which are the next?
Answer: The Mongolians or yellows.

Question: The next?
Answer: The Ethiopians or blacks

Question: Next?
Answer: The Americans or reds

Question: Tell me something of the white people.
Answer: The Caucasian is way ahead of all of the other races—he thought
more than any other race, he thought that somebody must made the earth,

and if the white people did not find that out, nobody would never know it—it is God who made the world. (Adams, 1988, p.227)

This kind of education was an assault to the identity of non-Europeans, which would ultimately hasten their civilization. Listen to the pride of a colonial District Commissioner at the success of culturally alienating the Africans:

> I find the pupils most interested in my talk about the King, the flag, the coins, and the administration of the country under a *Bwana Balozi*, the lion special emblem given by the King and worn in my hat. (KNA. DC/ NYI/ 1/2. 1932, P.58-59, cited in Bogonko, 1992, p.271)

Teaching the children about the superiority of one race and the consequent inferiority of the others produced individuals who are westernized in outlook, tastes and manners. As Kwame Nkrumah (1970) of Ghana pointed out, "many of them recanted their African heritage into which they had been born, as uncivilized and primitive" (Bogonko, 1992, p.271). The consequences of this deliberate assault to the cultural identity of the learners is well exemplified by Charles Mugane Njonjo, the Kenyan attorney general at independence in 1963 who blocked all attempts to make Kiswahili (a local language) the official language and the language of the legislature (Bogonko, 1992, p.237). He argued that to "teach Kiswahili in school was a waste of time and that to introduce it as an official language would stagnate progress" (Bogonko, 1992, p.272). A native Kenyan lawyer who could forward such a rationale was a product of a system that had alienated him from his cultural identity. The lessons on the "British history and those who made it, the bible lessons that belittled African and other religions, the Shakespearean and Chaucerian literature had convinced Njonjo and other Kenyan elite that there was no other glorious culture than the British" (Bogonko, 1992. p.272). It is no wonder then they aspired to assume the cultural identity of the British and transmit the same to the Kenyan

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youth through curriculum because in Kenya, as in many developing countries, the racial stratification was replaced by class, along the same structure.

As recent as 1992, I taught Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in high school as the main text. President Moi announced the teaching of this text in a political rally as he reiterated that literature without Shakespeare is no literature. This text is excellent for learners with experiential knowledge of the content and style of the book, learners who can identify with the characters in the text and the ideas they stand for, linking with the history of the time portrayed. To learners for whom English language is a second or third language, it is an understatement to say such work is irrelevant and inapplicable to their immediate environment. Having little or nothing to identify with, the learners passively listen to the teacher talk, ready to recite and reproduce the teacher's notes in the next exam. The learners have little capacity for mastering critical and analytical skills, which can only be acquired through a continuous process of patient encouragement and constant assurance of freedom of expression by the teacher for the learners. Due to lack of critical and analytical skills, the learners reproduce the teacher's words as the "gospel truth" hoping to pass the exam and proceed to the next level. Even when Kenyan literature is taught, English language is the obvious medium of instruction. Oral literature, a cross-cultural subject of all Kenyan ethnic groups, is a unit in the English language syllabus. It has to be taught in the language of the examination, such that it becomes a course like any other. It does not really help the students to understand who they are, or to define their culture as analyzed to meet societal needs. Instead, a lot of time is spent in transcribing the material; translating and discussing the elements of delivery that can be captured in the translated written materials. As with any other subject, the students learn through rote in an effort to "reproduce" and pass the exam.

Disseminating foreign knowledge like it is our own is not limited to literature in Kenyan schools. Almost without exception all subjects draw their teaching materials from the Western societies without giving much attention to materials within our environment. By junior high school for instance, we could easily reproduce essays on wheat farming in the prairies of Canada, lumbering in British Columbia, fishing in Newfoundland, while we could not have done the same for wheat farming in Kenya's Rift Valley, fishing in Lake Turkana, lumbering in Mt. Kenya, until we got to senior high school. In geography textbooks, comparison is usually made between Kenya and Britain or North America. For example, Kenya's population density and length of roads and railways are compared to those of Britain and North America (Harber, 1989).

While the subject matter alienates the learners, learning styles that are not conducive to learning emerge. What is unknown to learners is unfamiliar to the teacher as well. As such, the teacher relies on memorizing information from guided notes and is only prepared to deliver this to the learners in what Paulo Freire refers to as "a narration sickness" (1990, p.57). The teacher narrator becomes the authority, allowing little or no interaction for fear of being challenged, being overly sensitive to students' suggestions or input due to lack of personal confidence. Soon, such students understand their position in the learning process, taking the cue from the teachers. They become subservient to the teachers who demand unquestionable loyalty and trust in what they teach. Such teaching methods reduces the learners creativity, because the student "records, memorizes and repeats" (Freire, 1990, p.57) what the teacher has taught without attaching any real meaning or significance to such facts.

Such students are not likely to have any motivation to learn because they are passive

participants in the learning process. They memorize mechanically the narrated content,

which turns them into "containers" or "receptacles" to be "filled" by the teacher (Freire,

1990, p.58). This kind of teaching is what Freire refers to as a "banking concept of

education."

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the
> depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the
> teacher issues communiqués and make deposits which the student patiently
> receive, memorize and repeats. (1990, p.58)

Consequently, the evaluation process becomes a continuous source of anxiety for the

learners. With a curriculum that concentrates on imparting knowledge that will be tested in

an exam, it is little wonder that certificates become the top priority and almost the sole

determinant in the job market. Candidates reproduce almost a carbon copy of what they

were prepared to do and the National Examination Council rewards generously those who

reproduce the expected materials best with social status and a certificate to proceed to the

university. Those who fail to reproduce the material to the expectation of the examination

council are pushed aside and labelled as "failures."

Colonial education was imposed. It tried to pull the Africans from their social milieu

and make them hate their very being. It was a system that was geared to making Africans

submissive and subservient, to feel inferior and to accept the superiority of their new

masters. The school in its present context does not have the capability or even the

motivation of validating the cultural identity of the Kenyan people through appropriate

curriculum.

Research Problem Re-visited

Kenyan education has extensive literature identifying the problems of school curriculum. Such literature has shown that curriculum in Kenya has not selected from the culture of the society for which it is developed. It has been rightly accused of perpetuating colonial values at the expense of local cultures. Some of these problems are rooted in colonialism and the consequent racism that could only thrive by deliberate attack on the cultural values of Kenyan people. The post-colonial period does not seem to have made dramatic change either. It is elitist in nature and in practice, "has tended to concentrate on imparting knowledge for the sake of passing examinations" (Mackay, 1981, p.7). It is clear that the Kenyan curriculum in its present context produces individuals with little or no understanding of their history, little or no understanding of their language, no concrete symbol of identity, and little or no understanding of their environment. It goes without saying that such individuals have no survival skills in their own societies. As Professor Fafunwa argues, they are individuals who are "African in blood but European in opinion, morals and intellect. People who are "foreigners" in their own countries and are more at "home" in Europe and North America, than in their own country" (cited in Bishop, 1986, p.241).

By the same token, educators, academic and the general public have expounded the virtues of indigenous education. Bishop (1986) argues that education, beside being an instrument for the changing society, has the role of preserving all that is best and worthwhile in a nation's cultural and traditional heritage. The school has the task of making available to the young not only those facts and skills which will prove of value to the child in making a living in a sometimes uncertain future, but also to inculcate the traditional values of the past

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which will add meaning to life. Unless the preservation of culture is actively encouraged the culture soon disappears. To give a sensitive understanding of a nation's cultural heritage, it is necessary to teach its custom and traditions, its songs, dances, legends, heroic exploits and even its traditional culinary art and home remedies because, as Henri Lopez (1997) recently pointed out, education systems that do not reflect the cultural needs of the people are bound to fail.

Nevertheless, how such a curriculum can be made has not been supported by a substantial amount of research. While a number of studies have concluded that curriculum in Kenya is irrelevant and leads to cultural alienation, little has been done to show how a curriculum that has selected from the culture of the society can be developed. This study, carried out in one school in Murang'a district, Kenya, explored the kind of curriculum that fosters cultural relevance. It examined ways in which curriculum can be a place in which cultural values, knowledge, skills and beliefs that provide foundations for identity can be understood, defined and interpreted.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH APPROACH

Choosing the Path

When I first enrolled at the University of British Columbia graduate school to pursue a doctoral degree, I knew the place I wanted to go. I knew that I wanted to go back to the community where I was born and raised to do my research. The desire to go back was both personal and academic. At a personal level, I had missed my family very much after being away for close to five years. The complexities of living in a foreign country were taking a toll on my psyche, and I had to get in touch with my soul. It was because of this desire that everything I did in the first year of my doctoral program, including the courses I took, were geared towards taking me home.

At the academic level, going back to my own community was an obvious choice. Because of the nature of my work, cultural relevance in curriculum, I had to work within a culture that I could call my own. A culture that would accept me for what I am and that would not view me as an intruder. Indeed, a culture in which I am an "insider." I had also for my M.A carried out a study on cultural relevance in curriculum development in Native-Band controlled schools in Canada to determine whether the same could be appropriate for Kenya secondary schools. The information, which was obtained through a survey with principals of band-controlled schools across Canada and a case study developed through observations and unstructured conversations with a principal, teachers, students and community members in a Native band-controlled school in southern Ontario, provided valuable lessons that could be adapted and modified for the Kenyan education curriculum. It was clear from this study that students develop a strong

identity when their cultural values are reflected in the curriculum. This is important because a strong cultural identity enables individuals to become independent and self-reliant people who are functional in their own environment. People who have little sense of their cultural identity or have been alienated from their culture often become dependent and lack the skills of meaningful survival in their own environment.

The study also revealed that cultural identity is strengthened by relevant curriculum in community schools where elders and community resource people are involved in the development of appropriate teaching materials. Students develop a positive attitude towards school so that they stay longer to graduate. The study also indicated that when parents, teachers and community members directly participate in the education process through the curriculum programs, effective and relevant education is provided.

However, it would be wrong to assume that these findings can/could all be applicable and acceptable to the Kenyan people. Even for First Nation communities, which have embarked upon a well-publicized process, it cannot be assumed that change has happened very quickly or that the changes have produced instant results. After over two decades of applying a new educational policy for First Nations education in Canada, there are still some pockets of resistance to the changes. Indeed it could be argued, based on my M.A. thesis, that the most important thing for the Kenyan education system is to select the ideas and practices from First Nations education which can be expanded and adapted to the existing patterns of schooling with a reasonable modification of their basic structures, functions and definitions of formal schooling.

From this brief summary of my M.A work, it is clear that my desire to go back home was driven by the work I had began and which required further investigation. However, knowing the place I wanted to go was one thing, how to get there and what to do when I got there was the difficult task.

The Dilemma

I have grown up in this community, gone to school, gone to university and returned to teach literature and English language for over five years. I have actively participated in drama and theatre and I have been involved in teaching in one way or the other for over seven years. In this community, I have different roles: a mother, a wife, and a clan member. Each of these roles comes with certain responsibilities. Because of my history of being so rooted in schools and working with other teachers, students, and community members, I could not bring myself to do research **on** "others." Such research, in my opinion, often alienates and disenfranchises those targeted for research, teachers in this case, making them feel as if they are under a microscope (Smith, 1996). For those reasons, I literally agonized trying to come up with a research methodology that could adequately describe my lived experience as a teacher and a member of this community, and those of the people who were going to be involved in the research, without making them feel scrutinized.

Much of this agony stemmed from the realization that some of the existing research methodologies and the subsequent terminology have until recently excluded personal experience as a basis of study and analysis. Part of the reason this knowledge has been excluded is because of epistemological notions so that meaning as contained in texts and the study of texts, particularly their deconstruction, becomes the primary focus

of education (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). There is also the argument that experience cannot speak for itself, again putting the focus on the meaning contained in texts and the forms by which they are constructed. There has also been the contrasting argument that experience is too comprehensive, too holistic, and, therefore, an insufficiently analytic term to permit useful inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994,). Consequently, the voice of academic researchers with "insider" knowledge, the kind of knowledge which is based on experience and not found in texts, is often silenced/ or excluded (Ahlberg, 1991; Ndunda, 1995).

Yet, Ron Scapp argues in reference to a classroom setting, "when one speaks from the perspective of one's immediate experiences, something's created in the classroom for students, sometimes for the first time. Focusing on experience allows students to claim a knowledge base from which they can speak" (cited in hooks, 1994, p.148). It is from this understanding that I began my search for a mode of inquiry. During the search, I came up with four criteria: it must not be research *on* "others"; it must include the *shared experiences* of all the people involved in the research; it must be *dialogic;* there must be *sharing of skills* so that the *process* continues long after I had left the field. The challenging task for me then was to come up with a research methodology: a process of doing research. A process includes choosing a particular research problem, approaching the problem from a particular perspective and using particular techniques to consider the problem. It had to be a research methodology that would address these four criteria.

The Challenge

a) <u>It must not be research *on* "others."</u>

Social science research has recently been criticized by some academics as being a representation of the western academic thought that has invented an "other" as the object of research. Fine (1994) argues that much of qualitative research has produced, if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the "other" by reinventing the hyphen of self-other that both separate and merges personal identities. She further argues that this reinvention of the "other" has caused critical theory, feminists and third world scholars view social science as a tool of domination. Fine's argument resonates with that of Alcoff (1991) who says that speaking for the "other" has come under increasing criticism and, in some communities, it is being rejected as "arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate" (p. 6). This ultimately makes hooks (1990) wait for "them" to stop talking for/about the "other," "to stop even describing how important it is to be able to speak about difference. It is not just important what we speak about, but how and why we speak" (p. 151).

> Often, this speech about the "other" annihilates, erases: "No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can talk about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk." Stop. (hooks, 1990, p. 153)

For instance, in reference to third world women, Ndunda argues that, in general, their experiences have either been ignored and distorted but more importantly, citing Mohanty,

[Eurocentricism] and the desire to use western values as yardsticks have produced the "third world woman" as a singular monolithic subject...a stereotype that has worked to her detriment. (1995, p. 42)

Ndunda's argument resonates with that of Etter-Lewis (1991) who argues that to take a white middle class female's experience as a given and generalize to all other women ignores the women of color and working class women:

The effect of this practice is to establish a new canon with white female experience as its core. The distinct experiences of women of color in general, and black women in particular are by definition excluded. Their concerns can find no voice in a white female self. (Etter-Lewis, 1991, p.44)

One of the reasons why our experiences as third world academics, in effect, the "other," have not been embraced in the academic research terminologies originates from the very definition of social science. Bailey, for instance, describes social science to be "concerned with gathering data that *can help* us answer questions about various aspects of society and thus *enable us* to understand society"(italic mine for emphasis) (1982, cited in St. Denis, 1989, p.7). This definition, applied to my situation, may not adequately describe my experiences for a number of reasons. One, I may not need *help* from collected data to understand the very life I have always known. It would be fake on my part to spend time collecting data, which I can almost tell how they will look like. I would rather use the skills that can make a difference to each one of us, identifying the strengths of our resources and harnessing the same for the collective advantage of our school and community.

Secondly, I might not need the teachers and community members to answer questions to *enable* me to *understand* my own *society*. I do understand my society because I have lived here for the better part of my life as a child, teenager, young adult and now as a married woman with children. I have also been a teacher for a number of years. What I do

not understand though is how our community can challenge the status quo. What I need at this point is the ability to move beyond understanding my society and the ability to transform our reality for social change. I would like to work with the community so that we can understand the hegemonic institutions that have created and maintained our present social struggles so that we can collectively seek alternatives. Like Ndunda recently said, collecting data just to *understand* our own lived experiences will only reproduce "another discourse of horror" (Ndunda, 1996, personal communication). From this point of view, I was not sure my experience and those of the people involved in the research could adequately be described within Bailey's social science framework.

b) It must include the *shared experiences* of all the people involved in the research.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) define social science as being concerned with humans and their relations with themselves and their environments, and, as such, the social sciences are founded on the study of experience. I knew right at the onset that experience would be the starting point and key term for my inquiry. The challenging task for me was to sort out the appropriate methods of data collection that would be congruent with the experiences of the members of my community and particularly the teachers who would be directly involved in the research. Some of the methods of data collection and analysis I have encountered in my academic life do not allow experience sharing as a basis of inquiry because they are often one sided. Positivist inquiry, for instance, suggests that we must observe phenomena exhaustively and define them precisely in order to identify specific cause and effects. The researchers should stand apart from their subject and think of it as having an independent object-like existence with no intrinsic meaning. The knower and that

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which is or can be known are considered separate, so that the social scientist can adopt the role of observer of an independently existing reality. And since social investigation is a neutral activity, we should strive to eliminate all bias and preconceptions, not be emotionally involved with or have a particular attitude toward our subject, and move beyond common sense beliefs to discover causes and to make predictions (St. Denis, 1989). This way of doing research may be what Ndunda describes as a "linear method of inquiry" (Ndunda, 1995 p. 78):

> My fieldwork took me back to the village where I was born and raised. Reflecting on my entry into the research field I realized that I had to begin to think and act like one of the women of Kilome, a Mkamba woman, the ethnic group in which these women and I belong. I had to re-learn how to create the atmosphere in which women could become comfortable to tell their stories. This involved abandoning the linear method of inquiry. (1995, p. 78)

Even when other, non-linear methods of data collection are used, they have little room for shared experience. I'm thinking of methodological inquiry such as ethnography, which draws its strength in "understanding" an "other's" culture. I find it difficult to believe that I can successfully use ethnographic inquiry without contradicting or compromising some of my actions. This is because the terminology associated with ethnography is not precise enough (Kanyike, 1992,) and has until recently been exclusively from the white male domain (Ridington, 1987). Robin Ridington (1987) documents the frustrations he experienced when he tried to use some anthropological (often used as synonymous with ethnographic) methods of data collection in studying Beaver Indians. He had gone into the field with some pre-conceived ideas about hunting cultures, and was only in the field to confirm and reinforce his beliefs. He describes his experiences as follows:

It was a realization that it was I who indulged in self-delusion when I persisted in asking for data in a form that could not accommodate Beaver Indian reality. (1987, p.135)

This realisation helped him to challenge some dominant research methods such as ethnography which purports to be "an objective, authoritative, politically neutral, usually white male observer standing somehow above and outside the text" (Bruner, 1993). What has traditionally been rejected as mythical hence not valid in western thought is in fact an important contribution to knowledge as Ridington found out through his experiences with a man named Japasa (Ridington, 1987). Such an experience enables me to challenge the assumptions I hold about my community by reflecting on my agenda, avoiding the trap of collecting certain knowledge and dismissing other forms of knowledge as less important.

Further, when ethnography attempts to be inclusive, it has not embraced fully shared experience as the base of inquiry. Davison (1989), who has done extensive research among the Gikuyu people of Kenya (the group I come from), has the following to say:

The process of ethnography requires spending an extended period of time (a minimum of one to two years) in a cultural community different from one's own, learning the language and non-verbal forms of communication, collecting ethnographic data through techniques of participant-observation and interviews with informants in the community. (1989 p. 5)

Ethnography as a method of inquiry can limit me in a number of ways. For instance, my study site would include a classroom, a school and a community. A basic requirement of ethnography is that "we must observe all the subsystems in the unit and note their manner of articulation" (Johnson, 1980, p.6 cited in Kanyike, 1992, p.22). In the sites mentioned, it would mean observing all that goes on with respect to each and every individual at all times, which would be impractical for me in terms of resources and time. Along with this is the phenomenological view of ethnography, which claims that data represent the worldview of

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the participants being investigated (Lecompte & Goetz, 1982, p.387, cited in Kanyike, 1992, p.22). In the case of the classroom for example, I'm not sure the student's subjective view of the world as shaped by the existing curriculum and school values would form the basis for my analysis. Even where the teachers and community members are concerned, some of their views might be subject to challenge.

c) It must be *dialogic.*

I recently attended a presentation *Researching a Profession in Transition: Ethnographic Educational research in the '90s,* which had been organised by the Multicultural Education as part of the Multiculturalism, Nationalism and Anti-Racism Education: Research and Debates in Canada. The presenter discussed her field research related to teachers' ways of approaching children and parents' cultural and religious concerns in Quebec. She distinguished between four types of teachers, commenting on her *observations* in classroom regarding teachers' treatment of differences among students (UBC, 1997). The presentation was excellent and the content insightful. What really bothered me was the way this research was done and how this information was communicated to us. While describing the practices of the participants in the classroom, we had a good laugh at the teachers, who were often faced with the difficult task of managing a class of several small bodies packed in one room for several hours a day, and a teacher expected to treat all of them as special, and meet all their needs.

The presenter described vividly one kindergarten classroom, which the teacher had voluntarily allowed her to observe. In the classroom, there were five Black boys who the teacher had labelled the "gang of five." The gang was supposedly unmanageable, they

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talked to each other often and, even though they finished their assigned tasks, they never talked to the teacher directly. The teacher did not talk to them either and, when she did, it was to reprimand them. The teacher had concluded that this behaviour reflected the "gangsterism" that exist in their homes. As I sat at the back of the room digesting what had transpired, I wondered what would have happened if this researcher had invited the teacher to dialogue by making her answerable for her understanding of what was going on in her classroom and acting on that understanding. What shape would this presentation have taken if the teacher was invited to "laugh *with* us" at the way she handled/mishandled her classroom diversity and the resulting dynamics, instead of us, sitting in our privileged cultural setting (university lounge), laughing *at* her in her absence. I felt that this researcher had used her privileged position to silence and scrutinize the teacher. She had failed to listen to/talk with/share with the teacher the knowledge she had about what was happening in that classroom. Instead, she chose to share her knowledge with her peers/colleagues who think/act like her and who will probably reward her with prestige, publication and income.

This way of doing research, in my opinion, is harmful to the participants. It has no commitment to bringing the participants of the study into the process of knowledge generation. It also contradicts the epistemological position that places the importance on:

a) experiential knowing that emerges through participation with others;

b) beliefs that people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their actions within it.(Reason, 1994)

By providing a conclusive report, this researcher had failed to acknowledge that curriculum problems particularly in culturally diverse classrooms are contextual and multidimensional,

not to be encompassed by one theory and that they are never solved once and for all but require ongoing action. This is the kind of path I had chosen not to follow.

d) There must be *sharing of skills* so that the *process* continues after I had left.

Knowledge produced by social science is a powerful and effective means to influence decisions regarding people's everyday lives. Whether this knowledge is used for the advantage or disadvantage of the group of the people being researched "depends on who controls the research process" (St Denis, 1979, p.1). Reynolds & Reynolds (1970) argue that research and the consequent knowledge generated "has worked to make the power structure relatively more powerful and knowledgeable, and thereby to make the subject population more impotent and ignorant" (Gaventa, 1993, p. 27). For third world academic researchers who often have little control of the research process in terms of research funding, loyalty to certain schools of thought and academic institutions and the consequent distribution of the knowledge, it would be a miracle to expect their experiences to play any significant role in the knowledge generated. I would therefore conclude like Gaventa that:

> Where knowledge is produced about the problems of the powerless, it is more often than not produced by the powerful in the interest of maintaining the status quo, rather than the powerless in the interest of change. (1993, p. 26)

Because I'm historically situated within this traditionally powerless group Gaventa refers to above, my research had to be educative, a "dialogical approach to research that attempted to develop voice as a form of political process" (Pinar, 1995). All I had to do was "provide these individuals with a lens through which they could see themselves,

become aware of new ideas, or recognize concepts that they were intuitively acting upon but that lacked clear articulation" (Goodman, cited in Pinar, 1995, p.259). Doing research this way would ensure greater collaboration with teachers. This interaction would become part of the curriculum, thus, providing some skills that could be used long after I had left the field.

The Search Process

In my search for a research methodology that would accommodate my four criteria, I was informed by writings from various perspectives. Feminist research, for instance, states that social science research should be *for* women rather than *about* or *on* women (Patai, 1991). Harding talks about research *by, about,* and *for* women. She adds that, by documenting women's representation of their own reality, "we were engaging in advocacy. We felt that our work was indeed, political and that it was for women" (cited in Patai, 1991, p.143). Interpreted for my research context, it would mean removing the notion of political neutrality emphasised by traditional research enabling me to recognise my work as a political act. Feminist research has challenged the pose of neutrality and objectivity that has for so long governed positivists' social science. It has also challenged the hierarchical division that separates researcher and those who are researched. The model of a distanced, controlled, ostensibly neutral interviewer has been replaced with that of "sisterhood, an engaged and sympathetic interaction between two individuals united by the fact of gender oppression" (Patai, 1991, p. 143). This way of doing research may be what Klein refers to as *conscious subjectivity* and, Weskott adds, *intersubjectivity:* the kind of research in which the "researcher compares her work with her own experiences as a woman and a scientist, and

shares the resulting reflections with the researched, who in turn might change the research by adding her opinion" (cited in Hale, 1991, p. 125). For my research situation, it would mean comparing my own experiences as a member of the community, a teacher, parent and curriculum theorist and sharing the resulting experiences with the teachers who in turn might change the research by adding their opinion.

Feminist research is also concerned with the process as an occasion for intervention and advocacy (Patai, 139). Feminist research encourages honest and responsible methods, which do not just include protecting anonymity but also respecting the "informants." It includes letting people know exactly what the research is about and particularly to avoid the practice of:

1) tricking" people into exposing themselves;

2) intentionally luring them into contradictions;

3) using one "informant" to expose or contradict another;

4) manipulating people to obtain the "truth" and the "facts." (Hale, 1991, p. 123)

This would mean allowing the teachers to share only what they wanted to without exerting undue pressure.

Critical theory research has characteristics that concur to a large extent with feminist research. Lather (1986) argues that critical theory research responds to the social reality of people without power. It is research *for* the people rather than *about* people. It "aims to foster a reflexive and critical self-consciousness, enabling a critical understanding of social reality" to initiate emancipatory social action and to develop emancipatory knowledge, necessary for radically improving and transforming social reality (St. Denis, 1989, p.25). Other research methodologies that had common and complementary characteristics with

feminist and critical theory research included but are not limited to action, participatory, emancipatory and collaborative inquiry. Because participatory action research shares the qualities described above, I gravitated towards it. I found that beside the common and complementary characteristics it has with feminist and critical theory research, it moves further to:

a) emphasize the shift of power balance between the researcher and researched,

b) encourage dialogical relationships,

c) provide a voice and feelings to disenfranchised peoples,

d) show commitment to social transformation through action and reflection.

(St. Denis, 1989)

By using participatory action research I would get an opportunity of generating knowledge with mutual understanding, validate the cultural values of the community, which is complementary to the school knowledge, rather than contradictory. In the process, the children would begin to develop a strong cultural identity.

Participatory Action Research

Reinharz (1992) affirms that participatory research is an approach to producing knowledge through democratic, interactive relationships. Researchers work with community members to resolve problems identified by the community and the process of research is intended to empower the participants. Francesca Cancian identifies three core features of participatory research:

a) political actions and individual conscious-raising;

b) democratic relationships and participants sharing making

decisions and acquiring skills;

c) the every day life experience and feelings of participants as

major sources of knowledge. (cited in Reinharz, 1992, p.182)

In short, participants make decisions rather than function as passive subjects (Reinharz,

1992, p.185).

Reinharz' understanding of participatory action research concurs with Ada and

Beutel's (1991) affirmation that "participatory research is a philosophical and ideological

commitment which holds that every human being has the capacity of knowing, of analysing

and reflecting about reality so that she becomes a true agent of action in her own life" (cited

in McCaleb, 1994, p.57). Reason (1994) talks about the primary outcome of participatory

action research which he argues is a "change in the lived experience of those involved in the

inquiry" (p. 333):

> Participants are empowered to define their world in the service of what they
> see as worthwhile interests, and as a consequence they change their world in
> significant ways, through actions.(Reason, 1994, p.333)

Participatory action research differs from traditional research in its fundamental approach

(McCaleb, 1994, p.57). As Tandon (1989) points out, participatory action research is a

methodology for an alternate system of knowledge production based on the people's role in

setting the agendas, participating in the data gathering and analysis, and controlling the use

of the outcomes (cited in Reason, 1994, p.329). By attempting to break down the established

power roles between researcher and participants, it encourages what Sumara and Luce-

Kapler (1993) refer to as "collaboration" (p.393):

> Collaboration seems to have become aligned with the idea of equal
> participation, responsibility and representation-all subsumed within a

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comfortable, friendly community of persons engaged in a mutually interesting project or endeavour. (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993. p.393)

Collaboration frequently enhances communication, builds relationships (Peterat & Smith, 1996, p.16) and ensures that everyone's point of view will be taken as a contribution to resources for understanding (Winter, 1989, p.56). Though collaboration can cause tension, frustrations, dis-comfort, and dissonance (Peterat & Smith, 1996, p.15) and often makes people toil together under conditions of distress or trouble, making them exert their body and mind in ways which are sometimes painful (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p.393), it initiates an interactive process which Freire (1970) refers to as "dialogue":

> Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanised, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" of ideas in another, nor can it be a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (Freire, 1970, p.59)

Freire views this interactive process as establishing the participants as the subjects of their own history and encouraging shared control and generation of knowledge (1970, cited in McCaleb, 1994, p.58). The understanding that emerges through this research process is constructed jointly by researcher and participant and which I believe is appropriate for people whose voices have seldom been heard or documented (McCaleb, 1994, p.58). By inviting teachers to engage in dialogue with the researcher, they begin to feel that their experiences are important and valid. Teachers begin to realize that their words and experiences merit a valuable place in the making of curriculum. They also begin to realize that, by sharing their personal experiences, they can help their students and others to understand new and old ways of viewing the world. As William (1980) argues:

teachers are humanized when their lived lives, their real and varied experiences, and their unique situations and pathways to teaching are accounted for. Teachers are dignified when they are assumed to be a rich and powerful source of knowledge about teaching, when they are looked upon as people who are essential in making some sense out of the intricate and complex phenomena that they know best. (p. 2)

This idea of validating teacher's experiences is in keeping with the emphasis on participatory action research "as inquiry as empowerment" (Reason, 1994, p.329). The actual methodologies that in orthodox research would be called research design, data gathering, data analysis and so on take second place to the emergent processes of collaboration and dialogue that empower, motivate, increase self-esteem, and develop community solidarity (Reason, 1994, p.329). As de Roux (1991) puts it, the methodologies employed must at:

the rational level... be capable of releasing the people's pent-up knowledge, and in doing so, liberate their hitherto stifled thoughts and voices stimulating creativity and developing their analytical and critical capabilities ... [And] at emotional level, the process [must] be capable of releasing feelings, of tearing down the participants internal walls in order to free up energy for action. (p.44, cited in Reason, 1994, p.329)

This way of doing research may be what Hart (1995) refers to in reference to a school setting as the "decentred mode" which acknowledges the inevitable difference between researcher and participants' frame of reference and appreciates the significance of the participants' activity from this alternative perspective (p.221). Hart's decentred mode encourages us to challenge interpretations made from within the teacher's frame of reference, by inviting us to try and appreciate the meaning and logic of response from their point of view (1995). It could also be what Maclure (1995) refer to as "deconstruction," which has the task of destabilizing the binary opposition and challenging the closure of meaning and possibility that they inevitably bring about (p.108). Winter (1989) talks about

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"deconstructing," having the ability to reinterpret view points from differences and also the conflicts and contradictions with view points (p.57).

Participatory action research may also use methods that are traditional in approach. For example, survey techniques and then making sense out of it from the perspective of the community are often an important source of people's knowledge and empowerment (de Roux, 1991, p.37). However, participatory action research engages a variety of activities that are in keeping with the culture of the community and which might look out of place in a traditional research project (Reason, 1994, p.329). Activities such as storytelling, socio-drama, plays and skits, puppets, song, drawing and painting and other engaging activities encourage a social validation of "objective" data that cannot be obtained through the orthodox processes of survey and fieldwork (Reason, 1994, p.329). Because disenfranchised people are excluded from thinking, feeling, and acting as the subjects of their own lives (Park, cited in McCaleb, 1994, p.58), participatory action provides an important opportunity for "an oppressed group, which may be part of a culture of silence based on centuries of oppression, to find ways to tell and thus reclaim their own story" (Salazar, 1991, cited in Reason, 1994, p.329).

In summary, I can say that it was a challenging task to make a choice of an appropriate research approach that would value and accommodate the four criteria I had set up for myself; 1) that it must not be research *on* "others"; 2) that it must include the shared experiences of all the people involved in the research; 3) that it must be dialogic, and 4) that there must be sharing of skills so that the process continues long after I had left. What was important though was selecting carefully the qualities in various research methodologies that would lead to a social investigation involving full participation of the researcher and those

targeted for research; an educational process and a means of taking action for change. Since knowledge is a commodity which is bought and sold, it was important to identify a research approach that attempts to shift the balance of power by involving the powerless in generating their own knowledge (St. Denis, 1989, p.26).

Ready with an appropriate research approach, I packed my bags and returned home in January 1997.

AM I DOING IT RIGHT?

Reflections from the Field

Going back to the community where I was born and raised, now as an academic researcher, was both a challenge and a responsibility. It was a challenge because I found it difficult to describe my experiences as an academic researcher without burdening those experiences with the emotional turbulence associated with my prolonged absence. Having been away from home for close to five years, it was difficult if not impossible to wear my researcher "hat" and stand aside, outside the community to watch and listen. I found that I had to mingle. I had to be part of, to be in the middle and to act. How would I then call myself an academic researcher? Was I not an activist? Where does the border between a researcher and an activist lie? I found myself constantly plagued by these questions. Sometimes I felt numb as I realized that I had a responsibility to my academic work. Am I doing the right thing? Could what I'm doing qualify and satisfy that it is actual research. Sometimes I felt a hollowness in my chest, some emptiness, panic

attacks, getting worried that, somehow, I had taken on the role of a "missionary" trying to convert the unconverted.

It had all begun with my preparation for research right here at UBC. I had all along known that I wanted to go back home to my own community and carry out my research. What I didn't make clear to /or maybe I wasn't quite honest with/ myself at that point is that I'm too emotionally involved with the community maybe to a point where I could not just be a researcher in the academic sense. I must admit that I was totally unprepared on how to deal with such an eventuality. How could I prepare myself academically to meet my mother? A mother I had not seen or even talked to for the last five years or so? How could we communicate/express our feelings, our concerns, our worries, while my academic hat was in place? I miserably failed. I put all my guards down. I talked. I expressed my opinion. I raised questions. I probed. I argued. I discussed.

Inviting Collaborating Partners

I wrote a letter to the principal of Kamacharia secondary school in Murang'a district, long before I got to the field. In the letter, I explained clearly that I was a doctoral student at the University of British Columbia seeking participants in a study called cultural relevance in Kenyan school curriculum. I further explained that the purpose of the study was to collaboratively explore the possibilities of tapping the local resources to enrich curriculum in Kenya, so that teachers can begin to use both materials and human resources which are locally available and culturally relevant to meet curriculum goals. I would therefore appreciate the opportunity to carry out my study in her school and invite the teachers to participate in the study.

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Should any teachers agree to be involved in this study, their participation will include the following:

    a) Being interviewed at the beginning and end of the study.

    b) Attend bi-monthly and monthly meetings for the 1997 academic year.

    c) Gathering data from their efforts to use locally available culturally relevant resources in the classroom.

It is expected that the personal time commitment in this project will be 25-30 hours.

Information gathered in this study will in no way be used to harm or misrepresent participants or the school. Those who consent to participating in the study have the right to refuse to be involved or to withdraw at any time. Such withdrawal or refusal to participate will not jeopardize them in any way. (See appendix A)

This letter served as a first step in my journey. When I got to the field, I found that the principal had shared this information with one teacher of English language and literature, and had already invited him to join the study. Sharing the information with this particular teacher was no coincidence. The principal, who knows me well (she is a member of my clan), also knew that I had previously been involved in another language project where this teacher was a participant. She also has a high regard of this teacher in terms of efficiency and commitment to duties. She was therefore sure that this teacher would be best placed to act as my contact person.

The principal's assessment of this teacher turned out to be true. I had a meeting with him as soon as I got the opportunity. It is true he had been briefed about the study, was willing to participate but he had some concerns. In the previous project, teachers of English language from different schools had been involved. This had meant frequent travelling for meetings which had consumed a lot of his time. That project had to be done within a certain time frame, which had put a lot of pressure on him. Yes, I admitted that this study would

consume some of his time and I would also have a certain time frame. However, I would be flexible enough to work around his schedule, and particularly to set up our meetings at his convenience. This seemed to satisfy his concerns and he agreed to participate in the study. I then requested him to help me in contacting other teachers who might want to participate in the study. I think he did a good job in convincing the other teachers to participate because, the next visit I made, four university trained holders of Bachelor of Education degrees (B.ED.) volunteered to work with me:

Four males and one female.

Ages between 25-48.

Three married, two single.

Subjects taught: English/literature, Kiswahili/Fasihi, Biology, Geography and Commerce.

This is a small school with only twelve teachers including the principal and her deputy. It was therefore quite an achievement to have five teachers volunteer to participate in the project.

During our first meeting, I explained to them broadly what the research was about, how the research idea had evolved and where it was going. I also explained what the research would mean to them in terms of time and personal commitment. At the end of the meeting, I gave each teacher a consent form to take home and then return to me signed when they were ready to. All the teachers returned the consent forms the following week and the principal wrote to me a letter of approval allowing me to carry out the research in the school (See appendix C).

Research Procedure

<u>Interviews/Initial conversations</u>

As I had indicated in the letter I had sent to the principal, each of the teacher volunteers would be interviewed at the beginning of the study. These interviews would be conversational and dialogical, involving non-directive, open-ended questions. The questions focussed on the teachers' interest in, and experiences with, culturally relevant materials. The purpose of the interviews was twofold: a) to explore the beliefs, conceptualizations, and practices of the teacher; and b) to explore the reasons for initiating change in curriculum materials and the questions that arise in the process. The interviews would take 1-2 hours and would be audio-taped.

To carry out these interviews I asked each teacher to let me know when they could avail at least one hour within the course of the day. This worked well for everybody because teachers usually have gaps in between lessons, which meant that they would be in school anyway. I was able to get at least an hour in a period of one week from each teacher. We had the interviews in the school library, the only available space away from the interference of other activities going on in the school.

During my preparation, I had developed a series of possible interview questions, which I would use to generate conversation (See appendix D). Using the interview questions with my first interviewee was almost a disaster. I had, following the interview protocol, explained once more what exactly I was doing and what it would mean to him in terms of commitment. I then made a request to tape the interview so that I would not miss anything that he said. I'm not sure whether it was the tape recorder or how the interview questions were structured, but in my opinion; this first interview did not go

well. Rather than generate a conversation, the questions generated answers in monosyllables. The spontaneity in communication that characterizes conversations was significantly absent. This teacher listened to the questions carefully, waited for prompts and thought carefully before he said anything. This caution often produced tense moments because I was not an interviewer in every sense of the word. The questions were supposed to be a base on which to build. After my initial contact with the teacher, I knew the questions would not work. I abandoned the interview questions but I retained the taping.

With the rest of the teachers, we had the interviews in a much more relaxed atmosphere. Rather than following an interview question format, I allowed the conversations to take different directions. True, the teacher's profile was important to me, getting to learn a little about their personal and educational background (as much as they wanted to reveal). This served as a great opportunity for ice breaking because I found myself revealing to them details about me which made basic conversations possible. And sometimes, I provided an opening for subsequent discussion. For instance, being away from home for further studies in Canada created a series of questions which often enabled me to find a suitable entry. Much of what we talked about at this point related to the interview questions even though I did not directly use them. I also felt that the teachers were "sizing me up," whether foe or friend, and the conversations were well calculated. All our conversations were audio taped.

<u>Participatory Action Group meetings</u>

The teachers formed a participatory action research group to discuss questions of mutual concern, to identify ways and means to address those concerns. I managed to get three group meetings with the teachers. It was difficult to get the teachers together because of their different time schedules. In each of the three group meetings at least one teacher was absent. The group meetings were intended to bring the teachers together to talk with each other about the issues that had arisen in the interviews. During the first group meeting, I in a way directed the conversation. The teachers were waiting for me to prompt, ask a question or just make a comment. I realized at this point that even though each teacher had established rapport with me, they had not done the same with each other, which is an assumption I had made. Teachers are often very private about their classroom practices. Even though we talk about events and incidents of what happened in our classrooms, we seldom go into details of what we do once we close the door and take control of our classrooms. And here I was, wanting these teachers to reveal some private practices to the public. The safest route for the teachers was to avoid the main issues and talk about generalities. They lamented the present educational system, with a lot of nalstagia about "the good old system of our days," when we used to do this or that.

The Kenyan education system is in a major transition. While we inherited the British education system, with a little modification to suit Kenya, at independence in 1963, structured into seven years of primary, four years of secondary, two years of advanced level and three years of university education (7-4-2-3), Canada's own Professor Colin B. Mackay (President Emeritus, University of New Brunswick) chaired the Presidential Working Party (1981) which recommended a North American eight years of

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primary, four years secondary and four years university education (8-4-4) structure of education which has since been adopted. Perhaps at no other time in the history of Kenya, as at the present, has the education system come under such scathing and widespread criticism from the teachers and the public at large. The system has been accused of being too expensive, unmanageable and producing "half-baked graduates" who are often too numerous to be absorbed in the job market. It is against this background that the teacher participants found an opportunity to add their voice to the already existing din. The teachers may have felt that documenting such issues/problems they raised using an academic avenue might be listened to by "them" (a generalized term used to refer to authority/government/policy makers).

Much of what the teachers said was important to the general understanding of the problems currently facing the education system, I had to carefully steer the discussion towards the problem of lack of cultural relevance in the existing curriculum and their perception towards it. At this point I realized I had to take the role of an "initiating facilitator" in the manner of participatory action research (Reason, 1994, p.335). Taking this direction was a risk because at this point teachers had not fully internalized cultural relevance as a problem. It was a "risk" I felt was worth taking. Ndunda (1995), for instance, describes various methods of knowledge generation she used, at the same time being sensitive to methods that would alienate the values of the "women which can ultimately lead to withdrawal from the study" (p.53):

> The discussions that I held with women as individuals and as groups provided the space from the women to examine their compliance and to image out ways to challenge patriarchy. I found myself asking the women to move beyond 'sacrificing' themselves to create solutions, but also to begin to question and challenge the structures that perpetuate women's exploitation and subordination. (Ndunda, 1995, p.53)

Salazar (1991) also describes an experience working with young laborers ages 14-18 in Bogota to raise consciousness. In this case, the external agents had more responsibility in encouraging participation among a group of youth that had been socialized to believe that their knowledge was worthless by years of domination and exploitation. The youthful group had not recognized their labor exploitation as a problem. They had been born into poverty and exploitation and they had not been aware of any other life.

What is important in this description is the ability of an external group to raise consciousness of the young laborers without imposing their external views that would cause alienation. The young laborers gradually realized that their labor was being exploited after much reflection and soul searching through the analysis of their family history and popular knowledge, and this helped them challenge the hegemonic institutions that had created their dependence. They consequently generated some knowledge that was radically different from how they had viewed themselves (Salazar, 1991).

Ndunda and Salazar's experiences equipped me with the skills to problematize the lack of cultural relevance in the curriculum. I found this method of consciousness raising to be appropriate in the context of my research. Although it would be interpreted as hypocritical to critique the very education that has availed me a chance of "upward mobility" I felt that the same education has provided me with the skills to challenge the structures of domination, which has continuously led to the daily struggles for meaningful existence for my people. I therefore felt that I had a personal responsibility and commitment to communicate carefully that understanding through an experiential methodology defined through participatory action research.

As far as the teachers were concerned, there were other pressing problems in the education system that required urgent attention. Cultural relevance or lack of it was not a priority. Consequently, when I mentioned cultural relevance, many teachers wondered why I was asking them to turn the clock backward. To them, any mention of culture conjures up the images of the eighteenth century Kenya, images of what is considered in the modern era "primitive". How could I want them to return to such an era? What the teachers needed to understand is that culture is not static. Culture is not a frozen museum specimen. What we have is a living culture that guides our thoughts, our way of life. It was difficult to convince the teachers that we have a culture that is unique to our own society. They doubted. Where do we categorize a culture that has embraced automobiles, bank accounts, and university degrees? Of course it was easy for me. I have the support of literature to explain such contradictions. First Nation educators and academics have acknowledged and documented these issues (Hampton 1995; Hamme 1996). Beside the knowledge I have acquired in my graduate work, I constantly found reinforcement from the popular knowledge found in the community and which I would use to draw the attention of the teachers. For instance, at one time before a group meeting, Henri Lopez the UNESCO deputy director, had been reported in the morning daily as having said that education systems that did not reflect the cultural needs of the people were bound to fail (1997). I brought this information to the meeting and we discussed at length the implication of such a statement and what it meant to us. At another time, I had cut out a piece of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, again from the daily Nation in which he had been featured as warning Africa on alien languages. In the article, Ngugi had said that

> Africa will remain a continent of 'nations of bodiless heads and headless bodies' as long as a small minority continues to speak in European

languages and the majority in their own different communal languages. (Munugu, 1997, p. 30)

Using such information I discussed, argued with the teachers that what we have is in fact an enrichment to our culture if we are able to select skills suitable in our environment (Couture, 1978) and having the wisdom of using such skills. This is another point where I felt that I was rushing the teachers. I was biased. It had taken me over three years of graduate school to get convinced that we need not turn back the clock to reclaim our culture, that our culture cannot be described in past tense. Yet, I wanted these teachers to buy this idea within a period of less than three months, without the extensive support of critical theories that characterize graduate courses. However, little by little, I could see us developing some kind of understanding. Yes. Our culture is a living culture. We can no longer teach our children the skills we would like them to have at home because the socio-economic landscape has changed. But how could we take advantage of the present arrangement of the school to equip the students with useable skills? Skills that can be used in/out of the community, skills that can enable our children to make choices.

I deliberately planted some ideas/thoughts/questions, things to ponder, which we would hopefully tie to the issue of cultural relevance. For instance, I asked the teachers to think about some memorable experiences they had of their school days. Some of the teachers remembered some content, others a certain teacher or some learning style. There were also some bad memories of caning/hardships but we managed to salvage something out of the situation. Depending on which direction each teacher wanted to take I could raise the question of why that particular incident/ event was so memorable. We could then as a group analyze in detail the reasons why such an incident/event would

remain in memory long after others had erased. The analysis of these incidents enabled us to remember even other incidents in other stages in our educational background; the descriptions became more vivid and even more dramatic. The teachers by now had realized that they were not in a memory exam, each memory was important and had began to enjoy the "game." Their guards fell off, and they were now comfortable with each other.

The analysis of our experiences formed the basis for raising consciousness regarding cultural relevance in the curriculum. At first the teachers did not attach any real significance to those memorable incidents. However, when I started probing, it slowly dawned on them that there was something of inherent value to those experiences. For example, when one teacher remembered a teacher of his who was particularly famous for caning pupils, we discussed various reasons beside being just "a bad" teacher that could have made the teacher behave that way. We discussed that such a teacher may have been feeling inadequate in his teaching, maybe for lack of proper training, fear for being challenged by students or just lacking the capability of communicating his ideas. This inadequacy had translated into hostility, which could later be vented on the students. The reasons for inadequacy in a teacher are many and diverse. To be required to teach things that are not familiar to the teacher is a good source of those feelings of inadequacy. This helped the teachers to relate their classroom practices to what was happening to this teacher.

It was now clear that the teachers were beginning to find the lack of cultural relevance in the school curriculum as being significant. But what did this mean to us? I knew that at this point I had to share some skills and knowledge that would enable the

teachers to have the vocabulary in which to verbalize their thoughts. I began by introducing Freire's work on the "banking" concept of education. In preparation for the next group meeting, I asked the teachers to read a chapter from Freire's book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, which raises the issue of teachers assuming that they are the only "knowers" and that the students are "empty" vessels" to be filled with "communiqués." The teachers read the chapter and I could tell by the enthusiasm in the discussion that the chapter had equipped them with words that could describe their experiences more accurately. We discussed the issues raised in the chapter, trying to integrate those issues to our own teaching practices. This discussion brought out honest descriptions of classroom practices that could best be described as "authoritarian." Teachers described vividly their use of rote as the only teaching method and using evaluative practices that demand "memorization and re-production of knowledge."

However, I noted with concern at this point that teachers were beginning to feel "guilty" about their classroom practices, almost succumbing to that feeling of helplessness. The teachers may have felt that I was negatively judging their practices. In fact they had began to get defensive about the syllabus being too wide, being expected to cover so much content in such a short time, to justify what they had identified as defective classroom practices.

For the next meeting, I again introduced to the teachers a series of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work in which he describes the inadequacy of our education system as originating from the uncritical acceptance of colonial education and adopting it for Kenyan children. The understanding of this background allowed the teachers to relax and even talk freely about the historical incidents they could remember from some education

courses they took at the university or some lived experience they had. It was now a time to judge our present and to question the future. What can we possibly do to change our classroom practices? This is what became the core of my study.

Teachers Conduct Their Own Classroom Projects

In this part of the project, the teachers as individuals initiated projects in their own classroom based on the knowledge and skills acquired in the first and second parts of the research project. Which projects they initiated depended on individual choice and subject area, but they would begin to use resources which are culturally relevant and locally available. During this time, we could meet as a group to review and discuss the experiences the teachers had in their own classrooms with students or in soliciting local resources. This provided an opportunity for us to explore some of the struggles, tensions and frustrations associated with participatory action research for change.

It was now clear to us all that there is some historical background to the current classroom practices we are using. We are perpetuating colonial practices in our education, which are not just expensive, but continue to impoverish our society. At this point again, I noticed some feeling of helplessness beginning to envelop our discussions. What can we "little" people at the bottom of the ladder possibly do? Ours is to serve the system as it were. We only teach what we are expected to. We have to complete the syllabus. If we don't teach what the examination council wants us to teach, our students will fail. And then we can't explain such failure to the community, administration, and even to ourselves. We assume that those at the top know what is best for us. And anyway, are you suggesting we have regional curriculums? This is an impossible task.

I could really empathize with these feelings. After being a teacher and a student in this system, I'm well aware that teachers' views are not solicited when curriculum changes are made. The curriculum is developed at the top and distributed to the schools for adoption with no consideration to the regional diversity of the country. For the sake of national unity, we cannot recognize diversity. What can we do then? I realized at this point that I had to take some leadership role if the teachers were not going to be overwhelmed by that feeling of hopelessness and take defeatist attitude of "nothing can be done."

I had to make the teachers understand that lack of cultural relevance in curriculum development is not unique to the Kenyan education system. It is a problem that has been recognized, acknowledged and documented by educators, academics and interest groups in many societies of the world, particularly in societies that have suffered colonial domination in the past. The only difference is that, while other groups of people are doing something to change their systems, we in Kenya are busy perpetuating the system. I made a presentation of my M.A work in which I have studied the integration of locally available resources into the curriculum of the First Nation education in Canada. In this work, I had found that the use of culturally relevant materials in the curriculum enables the First Nations children to have a strong self-identity, have high self-esteem, and leads to self-determination and equip them with skills for meaningful survival in their environment. Without falling into the trap of unquestionable adoption of what can succeed elsewhere as being good for us, I suggested that we can adapt some ideas which may be suitable for our own environment and try them in our classroom. The teachers

agreed to adapt some of these ideas and to use them in the classroom for some time. We would then have a discussion to find out what we felt had been of help.

With each teacher, I discussed a topic, which they would introduce to their respective classrooms. We also agreed that each teacher would closely follow the objective of the curriculum but would try to use local resources to meet those objectives. That would enable the teachers to cover the syllabus as expected but use materials that would be locally available. Teachers began to work on their individual projects. Apart from the occasional questions of how are things going? I pretty much withdrew from the day-to-day activities. They were going to plan their lessons using the skills and knowledge we had generated through the readings/conversations/discussions/arguments during the first phase of the project.

The teachers were well aware that they now had control of the project and they would only invite me for a discussion about their experiences when they were ready for it. This would take away the pressure of what they were doing. The teachers had the responsibility of planning and identifying the resources that are culturally appropriate and use them in the classroom. Even though I had taken time to discuss some possibilities with the teachers, the final decision of what to do lay with them.

Researcher Becomes a Subject

One of the teacher participants left teaching in the middle of the project to pursue a more lucrative career as an officer for the Kenya Electoral Commission. Fortunately, his teaching subject was literature in English and language, which happens to be my subject area. The principal asked me to be a temporary replacement on a volunteer basis to which

I readily agreed. I was able to access a classroom and face the harsh realities of the classroom. I was no longer an out/insider observer directing an overworked group of people. I became a part of. I was immersed.

To some extent this arrangement worked well for all of us. To the principal, I was no longer an intruder taking away precious time from the overworked teachers. Besides, I was now to shoulder other school responsibilities such as attending sports, participating in parent/teacher meetings, taking students on field trips and so forth. To the teachers, I became just another colleague. I was now in close proximity to whatever the teachers were doing. We could now discuss the issues informally during tea breaks, lunch and as we walked home from school. To the students, I stopped being just a faceless body hovering around the school compound without a properly defined role. I was now the new teacher of English language and literature. A teacher who took them for field trips, took them to sit under that tree to tell stories, a teacher who was concerned with the day-to-day running of the school. I now belonged. I began to understand the culture of the school even more deeply. I got to share the staff room jokes, I understood relationships with administration, staff, parents and students. It was like a new life had begun. I could now view the world of teaching from many different angles. My being incorporated into the school worked well for all of us. Parents were happy because of my volunteer service.

However, I began to ask myself other questions. Was I still a researcher? Would it be ethical for a researcher to research on herself? What about the students I was teaching? What relationship could we have? What was my responsibility in the classroom and what is my responsibility as a researcher? Here I was, reciprocating to the school by volunteering my time and sharing knowledge with the students. But what is my ethical

responsibility? Would it be just okay to walk into the classroom teach what the syllabus expects of me and walk out, even though I'm totally convinced that we could do better. I continually reminded myself that ethically, nothing I did with the students would be used, as part of data because I had not indicated that I would be using students' views in my proposal or even in my ethical review forms. Yet, an unforeseen opportunity had arisen. Should I take advantage or would I just let the opportunity pass?

Non-consenting participants

As I got re-integrated into the community activities such as clan meetings, marriage negotiations, weddings, church, fund raising, parent/teacher meetings and so forth, I found some teachers participating in the same activities and it goes without saying that we quickly developed a kind of rapport. Here were teachers with whom I shared some interests/problems/ aspirations: our children attending the same primary school in the same grade, being members of the same clan, having communal responsibilities by virtue of marriage and so forth. It is little wonder then I found myself developing stronger bonds with the non-participating teachers as my research progressed. It was quite interesting to note that we shared thoughts and exchanged ideas in a relaxing atmosphere with the non-participating teachers, in their homes when I visited or in my home when they came. Or when we just met during communal activities, which gave me a solid base for reflections. Though I did not develop a profile for the non-participating teachers, they played a very significant part in the way I understood the world of teachers, viewing things from their perspective as we actively participated in community activities, events and occasions that are close and important to us. There is no time that these individuals felt that they were

part of the research project and neither did I at anytime feel that I was a researcher. Questions, such as, how is your research project going on?, often came up. It was only on those moments when I sat down to reflect that it could dawn on me the significance of what an individual had said during the day or I could remember a conversation that we held earlier or even something I picked being said to someone else. This information filled in the gaps or helped me raise some important questions for further discussion/ probing with the teacher participants. This also provided me an opportunity to understand the culture of the school better and by extension the role-played by each and every teacher in the daily running of the school. This in a way worked to my advantage. Here was a group of teachers who felt directly responsible for the progress of the research project. They somehow felt scrutinized and often pressured to perform certain tasks no matter how much I tried to create a relaxed environment. On the other hand there was this group of teachers who are technically outside the research project but who significantly participate albeit unknowingly. The question that constantly nagged the back of my mind is/was ... can/could I consider these teachers participants even though they had not filled in the consent forms? After all, a large part of my reflections is based on their thoughts /ideas/ suggestions.

Teachers interact with data

As a participatory action researcher, I had the responsibility of analyzing data collaboratively with teachers. I could not just pack my bags and leave before we had theorized and generated knowledge together from the information we had gathered. This part of the research represented a tense moment because I knew I was risking the

uncertainty of what the outcomes would be. Would the data contradict or complement my theoretical background? I was however prepared for any eventuality because I had a personal commitment to enable the collaborating teachers to gain access to the knowledge, skills and experience required to do social science research. I had asked the teachers to take the opportunity of the Easter break to reflect and re-think about their participation in the research project. Because the second term would be more involving in terms of teachers' time and planning, they were free to withdraw if they so wished. Except for the teacher who withdrew on technical grounds, all the others renewed their commitment to continue with their project.

Second term was going to be more involving for the teachers. They were going to plan their lessons using the skills and knowledge we had generated through the readings/ conversations/ discussions/arguments during the first phase of the project. The break was therefore a perfect opportunity for teachers to gather resources and plan for the second term topics. Generally, there was an agreement that the topics in the syllabus would remain as they were. What would perhaps change would be the approach and resources/teaching aids that are prescribed. They would only use locally available resources to teach certain concepts. They would also use less authoritarian methods of teaching, allowing students direct participation, and to direct their own learning. For teachers who are accustomed to being authoritarian and students who are used to the teacher as the ultimate authority, there was an element of mistrust. It was going to be a tough second term.

Before the break, I held a conversation with each teacher participant about what their next topic would be and how they were going to approach it. We discussed

possibilities, resources, learning styles, evaluation and so forth. I gave teachers a small notebook in which I asked them to note their experiences in the classroom because I would not come in to observe. I also told them that if they felt it was not necessary to write we would discuss those experiences once they had covered a certain topic.

The teachers were well aware that they now had control of the project and they would only invite me for a discussion about their experiences when they were ready for it. This would take away the pressure of what they were doing. The teachers had the responsibility of planning and identifying the resources that are culturally appropriate and use them in the classroom. Even though I had taken time to discuss some possibilities with the teachers, the final decision of what to do lay with them.

Participatory Action Research As a Site of Struggle

Although academics who are not participatory action researchers experience moral dilemmas as they conduct research with living persons, some of my experiences were almost paralyzing. For instance, I was living a contradiction. As a member of this community, a majority of the people have seen me as a little girl growing up to womanhood and changing my social status through education. They might interpret to be hypocritical to critique the very education that has availed me a chance of upward social mobility.

However, the same education has provided me with the skills to challenge the structures of domination, which has continuously led to the daily struggles for meaningful existence for most of the community members. I'm therefore justified in feeling that I have a responsibility to communicate carefully my understanding through

an experiential methodology defined through participatory action research. In the context

of teaching, the teachers would transform their teaching practices through action and

reflection while I played a catalytic role by creating "self awareness through critical

analysis of political and historical context" (St. Denis, 1989, p.23). I engaged passionate

scholarship using conversational and textual analysis, and analysis of spontaneous events.

The important thing to me was to treat the participants as knowers and particularly to

recognize and acknowledge that my knowledge and experiences stem from my higher

academic pursuits and cannot be useful unless I combine it with the local knowledge.

Moral and political questions arose in the process of my study. There were

frequent unforeseen consequences that developed as a result of implementing

participatory action research. For instance, I had a commitment to make social changes in

the process of my research because, in my opinion, research undertaken just for the sake

of knowing is pointless as well as asocial and immoral (St. Denis, 1989). The research

process would include the critique of the status quo so that the participants and I would

build meaningful and more just practices. However, I found that allowing the teachers to

interact with data was difficult to achieve. Even with all the careful planning, genuine

personal involvement and conducive cultural climate, some teachers for various reasons

were unable to theorize or use the data to generate knowledge. They still viewed me as

having power and control over the research project. After all, I would eventually get my

degree that would enable me to change my social status through the rewards that come

with it.

Such experiences enabled me to understand a little and appreciate the complex

nature of human dynamics that increased my awareness of the role I had assumed as an

academic researcher. I had to constantly re-examine and re-sensitize my underlying

assumptions and ideological perspectives in regard to the research situation. It was clear

to me that participatory action research has its own limitations, some of which are

contradictory and challenging. The source of these challenges and contradictions are

diverse and unique to certain research contexts. But what I gained by using participatory

action research for my situation outweighs the loss.

CHAPTER 4

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON LEARNING AND TEACHING

As I pointed out in chapter 3, my intention was to enter into what I called collaborative conversations that would be dialogic. This way of thinking concurs with Reason's argument regarding participatory action research as an alternate system of knowledge production based on people's role in setting the agenda, participating in the data gathering and analysis, and controlling the use of the outcomes (1994, p.329). By attempting to break down the established power roles between researcher and participants, it encourages what Sumara and Luce-Kapler (1993) refer to as "collaboration":

> Collaboration seems to have become aligned with the idea of equal participation, responsibility and representation-all subsumed within a comfortable, friendly community of persons engaged in a mutually interesting project or endeavor. (p.393)

Collaboration frequently enhances communication, builds relationships (Peterat & Smith, 1996) and ensures that everyone's point of view will be taken as contribution to resources for understanding (Winter, 1989). Though collaboration can cause tension, frustrations, dis-comfort, and dissonance (Peterat and Smith, 1996) and often makes people "toil together under conditions of distress or trouble, making them exert their body and mind in ways which are sometimes painful" (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p.393), it initiates an interactive process which Freire (1970) refers to as "dialogue":

> Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person "depositing" of ideas in another, nor can it be a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (Freire, 1970, p.59)

Freire views this interactive process as establishing participants as the subjects of their own history and encouraging shared control and generation of knowledge (1970). The understanding that emerges through this research process is constructed jointly by researcher and participants (McCaleb, 1994), which I believe is appropriate for people whose voices have seldom been heard or documented.

Introducing My Research Partners

To find a place where we had to dwell together, collaborate and dialogue, it made sense that we get to know each other, revealing some details about ourselves that would form a base of how we arrived at this place. What and who we are is shaped by experiences we have had in the past which when shared become stories. Our stories briefly tell of our his/her/stories. What follows are accounts of our his/her/story, sharing the experiences that have brought us to where we are presently. The accounts began with my own path as organizer of the study and principal researcher followed by descriptions of the teachers who participated in the study and who I refer to as research partners/ participants/ teachers in the study. I have constructed the teachers' stories by combining excerpts from audio-recorded conversations and from group meetings with what I had gathered through my reflective journal. I have used pseudonyms to respect institutional demands. I have however used names that retain ethnic background and reflect gender.

My own path

I attended the local primary school for seven years after which I sat for my Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E) exam. I scored enough points to warrant an admission to a government assisted secondary boarding school. After four years, I sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) exam. After passing this exam, I proceeded to the advanced level high school where after two years, I sat for the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Secondary Education (K.A.C.S.E) exam. Passing this exam guaranteed a place at the local universities. I chose to join teaching as a career for two reasons. One, teaching is one career that guaranteed a job at the end of training. Second, throughout my school life, teachers were the only role models I had had. I therefore trained to be a teacher for three years and returned home to my district to teach English Language and Literature.

Ngeche's path

I attended the local primary school for seven years after which I did my Certificate Primary Education (C.P.E) and joined a local secondary school. I sat for the Kenya Junior Certificate of Education after two years and joined a government assisted local school. Two years later, I sat for the East Africa Certificate of Education, which enabled me to join a national school in another province. It was after passing the East Africa Certificate of Advanced Education that I joined the university to do a Bachelor of Education degree (science). I have taught in three other schools before I came to this one. I decided to come and teach in my local school because I wanted to be near home and for personal reasons.

Mukuria's path

I was born and raised in Kirinyaga district of Central Kenya. I attended the local primary school in my community for seven years. After sitting for my Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E), I joined a local secondary school. I sat for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (K.C.S.E) four years later, and joined yet another local High school for my A-levels. It is from here that I was admitted to the University to do a Bachelor of Education degree, specializing in Kiswahili language, Fasihi and Geography. This is the school I was posted to after graduation even though I have taught in a local school as an untrained teacher. In this school, I teach Kiswahili language and Fasihi form 1 through 4 because there is no other teacher in this school at the present that can handle these subjects.

Mwingi's path

I was born and raised in Nyeri district of central Kenya. I attended the local primary school in my area for seven years. After sitting and passing the Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E), I joined a government assisted provincial boarding school for four years. I did my Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education and joined yet another provincial boarding school for A-levels. I didn't do very well in my A-level exams and after searching for a post-secondary training institution. I landed in a primary teaching college. This took me two years, after which I was posted to teach in a primary school near my home. It was during this time that I re-sat my A-level exam, which I passed. And I had applied for campus. So I was admitted to the University of Nairobi in 1990. I got study leave from the TSC and they bonded me for 3 years. So after the 3 years in 1993

and after the completion of geography and CRS courses, I got a Bachelor of Arts degree.
I completed my university requirements in Nov '93 even though I would have completed
the same as early as March. But we were affected by cost sharing, and also due to a one-
year closure after a strike, our completion date was pushed to November. After my B.A, I
went back to teaching and I was posted to another primary school where I taught from
November '93 to June '94, when I was posted to this school.

Wanja's path

I was born and raised in Nairobi. I attended a public school close to my home for seven
years, after which I sat for my Certificate of Primary Education. I joined my local day
secondary school for four years. After sitting for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary
Education, I joined a provincial boarding school in another district for my A-levels. I then
joined the University for a bachelor of education degree in business economics and this is
the first school I was posted to.

Murubu's path

I was born and raised in this community. I attended the local primary school in my area
for six years. I then moved on to a seminary for two years and sat for Kenya African
Primary Education (K.A.P.E). I joined a provincial secondary school for four years and
sat for the East African Certificate of Education (E.A.C.E). I joined a primary school
teacher training college for one year. During this time, I sat for my A-levels and passed. I
joined Nairobi University a Bachelor of Education (arts). Since that time, I have served
schools in many capacities. I have been a headmaster in two schools. I have served as a

deputy headmaster in two schools. I have been a career master, guidance and counseling master, and head of the department of Language and Literature in English. I have also been a patron of debating, journalism and current affairs club. At the moment, I'm the teacher in charge of staff welfare in this school. I have also supervised national exams. In the community, I have been a presiding officer in parliamentary and civic elections.

The Thread that Joins Us Together

We came together to consider how culturally relevant materials which are locally available could be used to enhance our curriculum. Smith (1996) highlights the importance of working with teachers who indicate an interest in change and who are willing to seize this opportunity "when mandated curriculum was in a state of flux and possibilities for change existed" (p. 42). Each of the teachers who volunteered has in one way or the other in their professional life shown some desire for change either for themselves as individuals or for the institution. Murubu, my initial contact person, has worked with me in another project. The project which was done jointly with teachers from Peterborough, Ontario, sponsored by Karwatha World Issues Center and funded by Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), produced, a cross-cultural story telling resource handbook for the Kenya-Ontario Common Curriculum. During this project, Murubu had been actively involved in researching, gathering stories from the local elders, disseminating them in the classroom and processing that information for a culturally different audience. In short, Murubu and his students had used the local environment as the classroom, he had to some extent seen the importance of tapping the local talent from

elders, and has seen that information as important in understanding other cultures around the globe.

Even though the other teachers were initially unknown to me, being constantly close to them enabled me to feel an underlying desire for change. Ngeche who coupled his teaching duties with those of school administration had a passion for the success of the school. He maintains a strict discipline, believes in the school being self-sustaining in food production, and keeping the environment clean. He is quite innovative too, creating mobile laboratories and, according to the Principal, " has turned his teaching subject from being a failure in national exams into success". The Principal has recommended him quite strongly for the position of a headmaster.

Mukuria, Mwingi and Wanja have only been teaching for the last few years. Even so, each of them has shown talents that can be tapped for the common good of the school or for teaching in general. Mukuria has been self-educating himself in education technology by privately sponsoring and attending computer courses during the holidays. This he does despite the fact that computer courses are expensive and are only found in the urban centers. For him it is an investment worth making and one which has consequently began to pay dividends. By the time I left, Mukuria was leaving his classroom teaching job to join the team of curriculum developers at the Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E) a Ministry of Education branch. This by all means is a promotion for Mukuria.

Mwingi is also the guidance and counseling teacher. He has been attending seminars in counseling which has equipped him with the skills necessary to handle the problems that are currently faced by the youth. This position of the school counselor,

which he had at first begun on a volunteer basis, was soon to become a paid position. By the time I left, there was talk from the Ministry of Education that teacher counselor's teaching load will be reduced so that they can have more time to deal with the enormous task of counseling. These teachers would also be taken for special training sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Mwingi would seize such an opportunity with open arms and he told me that he would be quite pleased with such an eventuality.

Wanja's own desire for change was quite evident. For her, working in the rural community was taking her a way from "where action is." She wanted to update her professional courses in accounting and eventually leave teaching for a more lucrative and well paying job. She was therefore seeking transfer to her home area, which would bring her closer to the city of Nairobi where she would have a chance of updating her skills. She particularly wanted to self-sponsor herself to acquire computer skills.

We gathered together to consider what curriculum ought or could be if it was re-formed to include culturally relevant materials which are also locally available in development, design and implementation. All the teachers who volunteered for the study had indicated some interest in change in one way or the other. Some were restless with the mundane curriculum that does not really challenge their intellect which is evident by the number who wanted to move on to more challenging careers. Murubu had tried other things alongside teaching and eventually had to leave. So had Ngeche and Mukuria. In fact, Mukuria was to join the Kenya Institute of Education, the body charged with the responsibility of curriculum development by the time I left the field. From this analysis, it is clear that the teachers who volunteered for this study are people with a strong desire for change, at a personal level as well as within their institutions. They are people who are

critical of the status quo and who are ready to take the "risk" of change. This way of thinking provided a conducive background on which the idea of change through participatory action research could thrive.

We came from a variety of places, disciplines and with a variety of life experiences. We were similar enough for communication and collaboration to happen, yet different enough to make the communication collaboration worthwhile. We began a multi-layered inquiry into what a conscious attempt to use culturally relevant materials, which are locally available into the curriculum, would mean, and whether participatory action research was useful as a process of curriculum/professional development and educational inquiry. Participatory action research offered a place to begin, a place for "listening to" and "talking with," and a place for an open on-going conversation about practice and dialogue for understanding that suited our purposes (Smith, 1996).

We explored the possibility of using local resources that are also culturally relevant to meet curriculum goals. This was meant to enhance the current curriculum requirements that have little regard for the cultural values of Kenyan people. As a group, we explored the rationale for expanding curriculum resources by using the locally available resources while our experiences and views of the current curriculum as teachers and students within the system became the basis of the inquiry. Once the rationale for change became established we explored the question of how much change could be accommodated within the existing curriculum so that the curriculum goals are met. We further explored the innovativeness of the proposed changes in reference to the ones currently in use and what implications it would bring to the teachers as professionals and

as employees of the Ministry of Education. Finally, we explored what the changes would mean to the immediate school community and the larger community.

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR OWN LEARNING

Privileging the "Foreign"

As I mentioned earlier in chapter 2, modern education in Kenya teaches foreign subjects, relying primarily on imported materials, ignoring its local resources and teaching methods (see also, Tedla, 1995). As to the reason, Kenya inherited in full measure the colonial educational tradition common to African countries that had been under British rule. The tradition was basically a "bookish one, deriving from both the concepts of nineteenth and early twentieth century European schooling and the logic of an elitist system which was designed to produce catechists, schoolmasters and clerks for commerce and government service" (Bishop, 1985, p.237). It is no wonder that, almost without exception, all my research partners vividly remembered some instances in their schooling when they were introduced to content and materials that were far removed from the environment of their surrounding. For instance, Ngeche remembers the following about his geography class:

> By the time I was in Std. 5 and eleven years old, I had a good idea of countries beyond Africa, the new lands such as America, New Zealand and Australia. At that age, I knew about other countries. I'd say it gave me broad exposure although it failed to sensitize me to the local situations. I think it would have been better if we were exposed to local things first before learning about other lands. At that time, we did not attach any real significance to what we were learning other than committing this information to memory ready to reproduce it in the exam.(transcript)[3]

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[3] All citations in this section are from the individual transcripts unless otherwise stated.

Ngeche and other children who were exposed to this kind of knowledge did not in a practical sense find this information useful. They gained the knowledge for its own sake though not to apply anywhere. In those "days few people had a chance of applying that kind of knowledge. They could only retain the information by cramming for the exam," he adds. Ngeche further gives specific topics that were introduced to them to show how the content was foreign to them:

> I remember for instance that learning about lumbering in British Columbia didn't make much sense to me. Transporting logs on ice and glaciation was new to us. We had never even seen ice cream. It was hard to understand then. I only got a better understanding of snowing in my A-levels when I studied climatology more widely. In general, little emphasis was made on local surrounding or even to connect what we had locally with what was beyond the boundary.

Ngeche is not the only one who remembered the introduction of content far removed from his surroundings in studying geography. Teacher after teacher gave glimpses of their geography lessons. Mukuria had the following to say:

> I remember vividly learning about lumbering in British Columbia. The idea of logging was fascinating because we were taught about water transport instead of road or rail, to transport the logs from the forests to the sawmills.

So did Wanja:

> When I was in Std.5 and eleven years we learnt about new lands in Geography such as Australia and New Zealand. I remember when I was fourteen and in form 2 learning about wheat growing in the Prairie Provinces of Canada, such as Manitoba, Alberta and Saskatchewan, yet I didn't know the wheat growing areas in Kenya.

One may be tempted to think that the nature of geography as a subject allowed the introduction of content that is not local or even from the surrounding environment. This is far from the truth. The teachers remembered how subject after subject introduced

content that was not local to them and even used teaching aids that were not locally

available. Ngeche for instance talks about his experiences in mathematics.

> I remember our teacher in most cases used foreign teaching aids to teach
> certain concepts. For instance, there was one question where we were
> given the dimensions of a freezer and those of a loaf of bread. We were
> then asked to calculate how many loaves could fit in the freezer. I failed
> that question because I didn't know what a freezer was, and could not even
> visualize it.

Ngeche goes further to explain his problems in understanding science:

> For example when we were taught about the refrigerator, I could not
> understand well because I had never seen one. I could not understand the
> concept of evaporation and cooling. Using foreign objects to explain
> simple scientific concepts made it hard to understand them. I think that
> those teaching aids were not appropriate.

Using teaching aids that are not locally available was widespread in all subjects as

exemplified by Ngeche below:

> For instance, we had this book called *In search of living things*, which had
> diagrams and photographs of insects that could not be found in our local
> environment. And in the book, we were instructed to walk around the
> school. What do you see? Lilies. Orchids. Roses. Hibiscus. These were
> plants that were not available in the school compound or even in the
> surrounding environment. This book was therefore not useful for us.

Even in subjects such as history in which the teachers would have expected to be taught

their own history first, they were still introduced to the history of other people. Wanja can

vividly remember about the "history we learnt about the Baganda kingdoms." And so

does Mukuria:

> For instance learning about the Baganda kingdoms and how they existed
> for a long time intrigued me a lot. It may be because such things did not
> exist in my country and if they did, I never got to learn about them.

When it came to English language, the teachers remembered the teaching aids used were

foreign to them at the time. Wanja for instance remembered the following:

> The teacher also read stories for us from storybooks. Later the teacher would tell us to read to evaluate our reading skills. We were given storybooks such as *Hardy Boys; Famous Five; Moses series*, in lower primary, and later other books such as *Oliver Twist; Jane Eyre and No Longer at Ease* were introduced.

Teachers going through this kind of education system that concentrated on imparting foreign knowledge, using foreign teaching aids and methods was no accident. It was initially a deliberate and systematic effort of the colonizing powers to remove the Kenyan children from their roots as a first step towards gaining influence on them. However, the fact that the teachers experienced this kind of schooling long after independence reflects the pervasive hold on the Kenyan people of the "foreign transposed" systems of education (Bishop, 1985, p.239), which is still evident at the present.

Teaching Strategies and the Hidden Curriculum

Looking at the academic credentials of my research partners, it is interesting to note that they managed to go through a system that imparted knowledge that was foreign to them and pass their exams well. However, it is important to understand the teaching methods that were used to communicate that kind of knowledge to the students in the classroom. It is also important to understand the attitudes that were instilled in the students through the hidden curriculum.

Among the methods used for teaching and learning in the school system in Kenya are lectures, reading, writing and memorizing. Students are often inhibited from learning in a variety of ways by the restrictive classroom atmosphere. Schoolteachers are often distant and uninvolved with student life. They perceive their responsibility as ending when school hours and they feel no obligation to reinforce what is taught at home and

community (Tedla, 1995). For instance, Ngeche had the following to say about the way

he learnt to speak the English language:

> When I was ten years old and in Std. 4, I could fluently communicate in
> English language. Whenever we met in the village paths with my teachers,
> they would talk to us in English rather than Gikuyu. There was pride in
> speaking English and it was an achievement for a teacher to produce
> students who could communicate well in the English language.

To produce fluent speakers of the English language at age ten in a predominantly Gikuyu

speaking area means that unorthodox teaching methods were used. Children were denied

the use of Gikuyu language in the vicinity of the school or even in their community in the

presence of a teacher. To be caught speaking Gikuyu language resulted in severe

punishment (see Ngugi, 1983). Wanja, in fact, did not learn her language at all in school.

As she revealed during our conversation, "we didn't learn vernacular[4] because our class

had pupils from different ethnic communities."

Teaching methods included the use of corporal punishment as well as

deliberately down playing the local knowledge. For instance, Mukuria had the following

to say about the teaching methods he could recall:

> There is not much I can remember about my own schooling particularly
> the primary school. We were expected to remain silent and listen carefully
> to what the teacher said failure to which resulted in severe caning. The
> teacher could talk for a few minutes and then we would be asked to copy
> notes from the black board.

Almost without exception, all teachers remembered the coercive methods that were used

to make them "understand" the knowledge that was being communicated. Wanja had the

following to say about her math teacher:

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[4] Ngugi wa Thiong'o defines the term "vernacular" as "barbaric tongues or language of the slaves" (1983, p. 93).

He used to seat us in rows depending on our performance. Row 1 consisted of the brightest students, row 2 those less bright while row 3 had the poorest kids in the class. We used to be beaten when we failed. Those in row 3 used to receive the worst beating. There is one topic I remember particularly, factorization using the tree method. I once did a sum for a girl from the other class and when the teacher looked at her work he knew she couldn't have done it because she was in row 3. She was asked who had done it for her and she said that I had done it for her. Both of us were really beaten. I never forgot that topic.

Murubu too remembered a particular teacher "who really used to beat us to instill in us the importance of taking education seriously."

We also had another teacher who taught us carpentry and he really used to beat us. He made us hate the subject because he'd rather beat us than show us what to do. We had a physics teacher who taught very well but who was very feared for the way he'd blast you if you didn't know the answer to a question.

The teachers did not just use coercive methods of teaching, but they also belittled the local economies. This way of teaching would enable the students, through the Darwinian evolutionary theory to despise their station in life and aspire for "civilization" (see Adams, 1988). And as Tedla, point out, the modern education in Africa makes the students scorn the ways of their ancestors, their heritage. Meanwhile, they long for a world they do not know and which does not exist. "Their perception of the West is one of fantasy often built on novels, movies and textbook portrayals" (1995, p. 205). As Malimu Nyerere (1967) pointed out in reference to the Tanzanian education system:

our pupils learn to despise even their own parents because they are old fashioned and ignorant; there is nothing in our existing educational system which suggests to the pupil that he [she] can learn important things about farming from his [her] elders ... And from school he [she] acquires knowledge unrelated to agricultural life. He [she] gets the worst of both systems. (cited in Bishop, 1985, p.238).

Mwingi provides a practical example of how gradually students with the help of their teachers come to despise and hate their own heritage:

> There was this teacher who once taught me math. He used to tell us that getting E.E.E [the lowest aggregate in the Certificate of Primary Education (C.P.E)], you are heading to the folk njembe (the symbol of peasant farming). When you look critically, you thought that if you become a farmer, there is no point of going to school. There is absolutely no point. Those peasant farmers, majority never went to school. And those who went may have been at the bottom of the class. And even in farming... there are those casual laborers who in reference to the E.E.E are popularly known as *fork njembe*. In that case, becoming a farmer, you are definitely headed for.

Considering that over 90% of Kenyans live in the rural areas which thrive on an agricultural economy, teaching the children the deficiency of such economies denies them a chance of actively and meaningfully participating in their communities. And as Tedla points out, the students lose their chance of experiencing the fullness of life and attaining personhood. The education system does not deal with what it takes to become a person who is a full-fledged member of the community with responsibilities and duties to lead a productive life. Instead, it produces highly disoriented youth: youth who have no practical skills to work in rural areas and with little or no opportunity to enter college (1995, p.205).

> What is taught in school is often left disconnected and suspended from the learners' African experience. It also creates attitudes and aspirations that turn away the young from agricultural work and their cultural heritage even when the only chance they have of employment lies in the rural and traditional sector. (Tedla, 1995, p. 189)

Evaluation and Assessment

Evaluation is among the most important process in curriculum development. It enables one to determine to what extent, if at all, the objectives of a program have been achieved. This implies, of course, that the aims and objectives are known and specified clearly. If the learning experiences and activities and the resulting behavior patterns expected are

clearly laid down then one can measure this objectively (Bishop, 1985, p.220). For the

Kenyan education system that relies on imparting foreign knowledge through coercive

teaching methods, it goes without saying that evaluation became a source of anxiety for

the students. This was well summarized by Mwingi when he volunteered the following

information:

> What I fear most are exams. I don't like exams very much, although I've
> been passing them. They are not the best because of that stress and the fact
> that those few hours of an exam will determine your next few
> years...where it could be a failure in life or a success.

The reasons for this anxiety are genuine in regard to what happens to those who do not

get to university or even to college. They are labeled as "failures" and pushed along side

the way, equipped with no practical skills to survive either in the urban economy or the

agricultural sector. This is because the education system is myopically obsessed with

examination grades and certificates at the expense of any other experiences that cannot be

graded. As Tedla points out "the elementary schools were preparatory for secondary

education, and the secondary schools were preparatory for college/ university education"

(1995, p. 178). And as Ngeche summarizes it very well:

> For this kind of learning, we had to use our imagination and how we
> succeeded especially in sciences depended on how imaginative you are
> and not your general intelligence. The more imaginative you were the
> better. So some students failed because they were poor at imagining or
> visualizing things in their minds.

Seen from the experiences of my research partners, it is safe to say that modern Kenyan

education is a short time companion that "leaves the learner uprooted and uncertain of

her/his status in the community, contemptful of rural life and work, and spiritually and

materially insecure" (Tedla, 1995, p.187). The teachers have experienced the pains of

learning irrelevant, inappropriate knowledge inherited uncritically from the British

system of education.

TEACHERS PERSPECTIVES ON THEIR OWN TEACHING

<u>Teacher Training</u>

Educational change can only succeed when teachers are sufficiently impressed by the

validity of the new approach and thoroughly grounded in the techniques necessary for its

implementation (Bishop, 1985). Poorly educated teachers can teach only what they

know, and so cling to the textbook and depend on the narrow, formal framework of the

system to give them their sense of security. When in doubt, they fall back on the ways in

which they were themselves taught a generation earlier (Bishop, 1985). It was therefore

interesting to listen to the teachers' perspectives regarding their own training.

Even though the teachers felt that things were becoming much more tangible as

they went up the education ladder, as Wanja revealed:

> In A-level geography, we learnt about our continent, Africa in greater
> detail, our country Kenya, regional geography and field work, in which we
> learnt about the local area. We could be assigned a project on a coffee
> growing area and we would be required to find out/learn all about coffee
> growing, physical geography where you would be assigned to study a river
> for example and report about it. You would go out and try to find out how
> a certain geographical feature was formed. This is something you could
> see.

And Ngeche adds:

> At this level, we had the advantage of doing something advanced and it
> had no limits. The deeper you went, the better for you. You were very
> much on your own and independent. I remember in a subject like
> chemistry we learnt about elements and how they are applied and there
> was an applied section in every subject where you were asked to state how
> this knowledge was applicable to you. So I think this was much better.

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> This also happened at the university. For instance the botany we did emphasized on local plants that you could collect within the locality.

Mwingi attributes some of his attitude towards education as originating from some courses he took at the university.

> After learning about the history of education, it dawned on me to some extent the origin of all the negative attitude we have for our own traditional economies. When education was first introduced to Africans, it was those people especially the former slaves when they were resettled and rehabilitated...they were mainly trained for vocational jobs. Those jobs included agriculture, carpentry etc. And especially those trained in agriculture. Even during colonial times, they were trained to work in European farms, where they were termed as servants or "boys" while their employers were referred to as boss or master. As servants, they worked on the farms for very little pay as compared to the income from whatever they were producing. This obviously produced a hierarchy because those who seemed to be loyal to the establishment would be promoted to be the managers of those farms, popularly known as nyabara (overseer). But those who were a little enlightened could become your bosses, and if not, they would be employed by the then government. And this continued even after independence. And even today, this trend continues. Looking at the history of education, I cannot say that we have moved away from that kind of thinking.

Teachers were positive about some of their experiences, particularly those that allowed some independence in learning, drawing learning resources from the local environment. However, they could not say the same happened in their respective teacher training colleges. In teacher-training colleges in Kenya, the educational philosophies of the twentieth century are taught by the methods of the nineteenth century. The predominant mode of instruction is the lecture. Since "teachers tend to teach what they were taught, not the way they were taught to teach, those didactic methods are continued in the schools" (Bishop, 1985, p.200). The curriculum in teacher training college in Kenya starts with the assumption that the teachers should have a broad liberal education, should be masters of the subject or a group of subjects they expect to teach and that training

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should be paralleled by practical and professional education which will enable them to acquire knowledge of the learner, the learning situation and the learning process, as well as familiarity with the problems to be met and new meaning to the subjects and instruction (Bishop, 1985, p.203). From this assumption, the teacher-trainees would not only be better informed, but "able to respond to an intellectual challenge, with experiences that have enlarged their understanding and sympathy, and with some understanding of community, its problems and its prospects" (Omulando, 1992, p.228). Unfortunately, however, this is not what my research partners felt about their own training. Ngeche for instance had the following to say about his university teacher training:

> But I cannot say the same happened with all subjects particularly the education courses. The knowledge gained at the university I would say gave the basics/ the skeleton, but it did not give the flesh. I'd say after teaching for 10 years, it is only now that I feel confident that I've mastered what is expected of a teacher. Teaching practice was too short and didn't give us enough exposure. I'd imagine that to get such exposure, one requires at least one year of teaching. The number of lessons we taught also limited this exposure during T.P. They were a maximum of 10 per week whereas the real situation one has up to 30 lessons. We should have at least 25 lessons during T.P. because this is what you are given at the final posting. For instance, doctors on internship do one year and they are required to do everything while under supervision. Teachers should do the same.

From this observation, it is obvious that lack of proper training at the university, particularly in education courses, produces teachers who are not competent in their job, as Ngeche points out below:

> The university curriculum on education is not up to date and does not produce competent teachers. They feel as though the circumstances they meet in school do not meet their standards and they feel misplaced. They cannot therefore teach well. By the time they come to terms with the teaching environment they have wasted five (5) good years. I tend to think that the curriculum at the university is not adequate. The theory is

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fine but the practical exposure is poor. The supervisors have little information about the secondary environment. Some were never teachers or even if they are, they taught a long time ago. They are not exposed to the current Kenyan education situation. They often talk of students in Britain and North America.

Ngeche does not even think the books used at the university are appropriate.

> Some books written for evaluation are written for other countries with different cultures and these are the only books university students are exposed to. Universities and teacher training colleges need to be in touch with reality. For example, some schools only have one laboratory, yet students coming from the university are taught about the physics, chemistry and biology lab. In some schools, the same lab turns into a dining hall during meal times and so on. When one is being taught administration and management, one is taught as if these buildings are in obvious existence. Students therefore cannot understand this when they meet the facilities lacking. Students need to be prepared to meet these challenges and they must be taught to be innovative. If they find there is no laboratory in the school, they can use the available materials to make a mobile lab.

Teaching as a profession in Kenya has therefore failed to appeal, attract and retain the teachers it has trained. One of the reasons it has failed to do so is well summarized by Mukuria's revelation that he never wanted to be a teacher in the first place:

> It is only that I found myself taking the Bachelor of Education degree in circumstances beyond my control. If I had a choice, I would have taken another career. I joined University at a time when there was almost a national crisis in university admissions. There was a backlog of two years, two sets of students who were to join the state universities such that when we got there, we were directed to follow a certain route. And it was the only route there was. There was a limited choice though. Between a general Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education. I opted for education for obvious reasons. You can see from these experiences that I didn't want to be a teacher although I'm one right now. I would have liked to get into administration even though these are options I'm pursuing right now.

Teacher shortages, low salaries, high student-teacher-ratios and low morale have made teaching an unattractive profession. Teachers leaving the profession to pursue more rewarding opportunities in other areas of the economy is quite common as evidenced by

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the exit of Murubu from the teaching profession before I left the field. Murubu did not even feel that the preparation he got at the university was good enough:

> The preparation I got on teaching wasn't very good because we were the last [education students] to study education in Nairobi University before they shifted to Kenyatta University College. Our training wasn't very practical oriented and as a result we got a lot of problems when we went for teaching practice.

It is no wonder that after several years of teaching, he left the profession with no apologies. And it was quite obvious others would follow suit. Attrition and wastage in teacher education is a chronic problem facing those who are charged with the responsibility of planning in Kenya just like many developing countries. Poor pay, poor prospects and a poor professional environment has been cited as the main causes (Omulando, 1992).

Reflections on Teaching/Learning Strategies

Bishop (1985) points out that among the most important factors in the psychology of learning are motivation and interest. Pupils' motivation and interest in what they learn, he further argues, "can be enhanced by ensuring the matter they experience is relevant to life, has some bearing on the social conditions, the environment, the world around them" (p.102). It is the teacher's job to make the teaching/learning situations and experiences interesting. However, for teachers who have during their own learning been exposed to foreign knowledge through coercive teaching methods, and also inadequately trained, it is interesting to see how they mis/handle their own teaching, particularly to see how their present practices are affected by their past experiences. Ngeche for instance does not

think that English language is privileged enough in the school, as he would like to see. He says:

> I think today the way the teachers of language do it, there is a lot lacking. You find students nowadays communicate in Gikuyu even in school. They are not fluent in English language.[5]

Ngeche's sentiments can be well understood in as far as the "success" of his students in national examinations is concerned. All examinations except Kiswahili and a few other foreign languages are set in English. It is therefore no wonder that Ngeche feels anxious that the standard of spoken English in the school is deteriorating which he attributes to the failure of English language teachers to adopt strategies that would ensure fluency and encourage students to use it at all times "as my teacher in primary school did."

What Ngeche and others with similar sentiments may want to do is to problematize the use of English language as *the* only language of examination and curriculum. As Bogonko points out, "English language erodes African culture and perpetuates Western neo-colonialism" (1992, p.245). The use of English language in school, he further argues, accelerates and perpetuates the growth of a top privileged class because most parents are denied the chances of helping their children as most of them do not understand the language (1992):

> Thinking in one's own language and writing in a foreign language retards progress and development since the latter means of expression is not reinforced out of school by what one uses and hears at home and the market place. (Bogonko, 1992, p.248)

This is why the students Ngeche is referring to are not motivated to use the English language as their only means of communication at school unless their teachers use

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[5] See an earlier discussion on the deference towards the English language in Kenyan school and the source of such deference.

coercive methods discussed earlier, and which I presume their language teachers have no intention of using.

Wanja also feels that the students are not exposed to knowledge that is foreign to them as well as she was when she went to school. She had the following to say about their lack of exposure:

> But these students lack exposure about current issues even those affecting them. The other day I asked them about Ken Saro Wiwa[6] and no one knew who he was. I've noticed that they have little capacity to do work on their own. They expect to be told everything by the teacher.

Wanja's sentiments as expressed here shows the anxiety of teachers to impart foreign knowledge as the measure of Western education. The school, Bishop points out, "takes the child out of his [her] environment and that it is, in consequence, a factor of individual maladjustment and social imbalance" (1985, p.238). It is no wonder as Tedla points out that through modern education, "Western products, fashion and aesthetic values are elevated at the cost of traditional products and sensibilities" (1995, p. 180).

> Locally and traditionally produced goods are often scorned since these are not considered sophisticated or advanced enough for the taste of [modern educated]. (1995, p.179)

Teachers "Scrutinize" Their Teaching Practices

Through collaborative dialogue and discussions, the teachers had begun to realize that there is something inherently wrong with the way they do things. They had begun to realize and acknowledge that what they teach and the methods they use in teaching are in most part authoritative and coercive. They were therefore ready enough to open their usually "locked classroom doors" to allow others to "scrutinize" them as well as

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[6] A Nigerian activist "murdered" by his government together with nine other activists for protesting against pollution in Ogoniland caused by oil companies particularly Shell.

participate in the "scrutiny." This occurred because of my earlier commitment that I would invite the teachers to dialogue by making them answerable for their understanding of what was going on in their classrooms and acting on that understanding (see chapter 3). Listen to Mukuria articulating the source of coercive teaching practices for instance:

> When I was in college, I remember a lecturer in education measurements and evaluation who used to tell us that there is no difference between variants and standard deviations. Then we would argue with him that there is a difference, to which he would retort..."there is no difference! You just take what I'm telling you...after all, I'm the one who has set the exam and I'm the one who will mark it."

Such coercive practices of teaching methods, as Mukuria argues, permeates the entire system of education in Kenya from university to nursery school, and Murubu supports the argument:

> The system of education that we have, and the kind of system that the students have been exposed to right from nursery, primary, secondary and university where the students are supposed to learn, and by learning they are supposed to be told, "this is what you should learn and you are supposed to listen. You memorize those parts that have been given to you by the teacher". The system has been such that the teacher is in fact a dictator. In fact, it is true. The teacher is the dictator, and the student must learn and has no room for questioning. You don't give room for questions. You don't give a chance for any questions. In fact, until recently, even in secondary schools, teachers could not tolerate certain questions. Because I remember we never used to tolerate some questions. Especially those which are challenging you. In fact, we used to hate it. But these days we allow them because things are changing too much. You allow almost any type of question. But traditionally, teachers never used to allow any kind of questions. They could never be challenged. It is all because of the system.

Basing this way of teaching on Freire's "banking concept" of education, teachers were able to generate important knowledge regarding the source of such teaching methods, as well as offering practical solutions of how such practices can be avoided. Mukuria for instance pointed out that the lecturer in question (see above) was trying to "deposit" his

material and "we as students were to passively listen" and accept without question.

Fortunately however, this incident happened at the university where students have some

degree of freedom and so the students were able to "walk out of the class in protest." In

high school though, "the students don't ask questions, they are supposed to accept that

whatever the teacher is telling them is very true and there should be no question about it"

(Mukuria).

Sources of Such Teaching Practices

Through collaborative dialogue, group discussions and reflections, the teachers generated

important information regarding the source of the teaching practices they had identified

as coercive, authoritative and in most part, using materials that are not culturally

appropriate or even locally available. The reasons for such practices are many and diverse

as far as the teachers were concerned. However, two broad themes emerged:

a) Historical reasons;

b) National curriculum guidelines.

The following section discuss in greater details these two themes.

a) Historical Reasons

Ngeche sees this problem of the teacher being *the* authority and using coercive methods

of teaching as originating from the history of formal education in Kenya.

> If you look at the history of education in Kenya today, this problem started
> early when formal education was introduced, at the time when whatever
> beliefs people had or people's culture was not incorporated into the
> education system ... such that all along there has been that tendency of
> showing that students' experiences when growing up are supposed to be
> removed, eradicated completely. And the student is supposed to be fed
> with what is seen as modern ideas. And these modern ideas have nothing
> to do with that student's system. So it is like you are supposed to erase

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whatever experiences the student had before coming to school, and feed that student with new information. And then ignore whatever experiences the student has outside the school. So we tend to see as if the experiences in school as the right thing for that student irrespective of whatever background such a student maybe having.

Ngeche's way of thinking concurs with the historical facts on how formal education was first introduced by Christian missionaries in Kenya. Formal education imposed British values, beliefs and customs in order to "civilize" the Kenyans and provide them with skills necessary for the survival of the colony (Leaky, 1954). The missionaries had one aim: to spread Christianity, save the souls of the 'heathens' and bring them to Christ. They would 'serve the primitive Kenyans' by bringing western civilization to them (Sherfield, 1973). With such goals and objectives, the missionaries embarked on developing a curriculum that would eradicate all the 'heathen practices' the children brought to school. The content would be the word of God, written and disseminated in the language of the missionaries. Thus, formal education became the agent of assimilation and subordination. For children who had been accustomed to using their own language to practice their beliefs, customs and traditions, it goes without saying that the missionaries had to employ any means possible to eradicate such practices. And as Mukuria points out:

> First of all this was the mentality taken by the Europeans and then the Africans who became teachers took over from the Europeans perpetuated the same mentality, the way they used to command, such that, that fear was instilled into the student, whereby the student was not supposed question the teacher, even when there was something that was not very clear. Such that, closeness was not developed whereby the student could ask a question or even tell the teacher, the way you are putting it is not right. That fear even today seems to be there.

The legacy left behind by the Christian missionaries, it seems, has been internalized and

passed on to succeeding generations of teachers. It is an attitude that has developed over a

long period of time such that the teacher being viewed as *the* authority is not limited to

the students. Even community members think in the same way, which is not a wonder

because they have gone through the same system, as Ngeche points out below:

> There is the tendency, or the mentality that whatever the teacher says is
> the "gospel truth." And that mentality is even out there with the general
> public. And people will rarely question the teachers' behavior in
> classroom. And if a student becomes critical of what is being taught, that
> one is seen as a radical and people will not take it kindly...and that student
> may be taken as defiant and should be expected to conform with what is
> actually being taught.

The teachers felt that a lot of what they do in the classroom has a historical background

that goes way back to the introduction of formal education by Christian missionaries.

However, over the years, other things within the system have perpetuated and maintained

to a certain extent the coercive authoritarian practices that were used by the missionaries

with the aim of assimilating and subordinating the Kenyan children to some specific

beliefs, values and traditions.

The education system in Kenya has continued to provide its citizens with

education that protects and maintain the status quo in a process that McLaren (1989)

refers to as hegemony. Hegemony refers to the maintenance of domination not by sheer

exercise of force:

> but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms and social
> structures produced in specific sites such as the church, the state, the
> school, the mass media, the political system and the family. (McLaren,
> 1989, p.173)

The school as a site of perpetuating this hegemony is well exemplified by Mukuria when

he argues that in most cases:

students are directed and they are told, "we are going to take this path or rather this route and there are no other routes that you can follow. There is only this route and this route alone." So they will only have to listen to what you are telling them and there is no discussion.

It is not that the teachers are comfortable using coercive and authoritarian methods of teaching to maintain the status quo. On the contrary, they feel that the demands and expectations of the centrally developed national curriculum guideline plays the most significant role in the way they teach, as Murubu points out below:

> I think I had no way out as an individual, as an individual teacher. I cannot divorce myself from the type of curriculum and the type of planning that has been done by other people, who presumably know better. Like from the ministry etc, because if I don't do that, the aim or the objective of my teaching will not be met. Because the objective is to reproduce what has been taught in the best way possible, the way I have presented the facts to them so as to pass the exam. Failure to do so, they do not pass.

b) National Curriculum Guidelines

Curriculum has been defined as the "sum total of all experiences a pupil undergoes" (Bishop, 1985, p.1). Curriculum is not so much concerned with prescribing the knowledge to be acquired as with the area of learning experiences to be organized by teachers, both within and outside the school, to enable pupils to adopt a positive attitude to learning, to acquire and apply knowledge and skills, and to develop their tastes and balanced values (Bishop, 1985). Curriculum does not develop in a vacuum; one must consider the "values, the traditions, the beliefs, the whole culture, or way of life of the society" (Bishop, 1985, p.2). However, this is not the case in as far as curriculum in the republic of Kenya is concerned as I mentioned in chapter 2. As Bishop points out, "metropolitan countries have tended to export their educational systems lock, stock and

barrel, rather than encouraging a local product geared to the indigenous societies" (1985, p.241). And as Professor Fafunwa remarks:

> The syllabi of most of the subjects taught are replicas of the English, French or Portuguese syllabi. Under such conditions the students that Africa will produce will be those who are African in blood but English, French or Portuguese in opinion, morals and intellect. Consequently, they will tend to be "misfits" in their own society. (cited in Bishop, 1985, p.241)

The above observation of Fafunwa is a true reflection of what is happening in Kenya today as reflected by the experiences the teachers have had with the Ministry of Education curriculum guidelines. Teacher after teacher attributed their teaching practices to the demands placed on them by the curriculum guidelines from the Ministry of Education, popularly known as the syllabus. The teachers are expected to teach and cover this information as directed in the school syllabus which consequently determine their classroom behavior. Listen to one of Wanja's teaching experiences:

> Yesterday we were learning about international agreements and the problems faced by ECOWAS that is made up of the West African English, Portuguese and French speaking countries. I don't think they learnt about the European scramble for the partition of Africa. They therefore find it very difficult to understand how the political situation in Nigeria and human rights abuse for instance Saro Wiwa's case has created problems for ECOWAS. They don't read the newspapers and are therefore unaware of such issues. I recently asked them the former Yugoslavia broke into which countries and no one had an idea.

What is frustrating for Wanja is the fact that students do not seem to know much about the current issues happening around the world, but they don't seem to understand issues about their own country either. They are unaware about who the new Ministers appointed in the recent reshuffle are:

> I have to sensitize them on current issues such as the Kenya Creameries Cooperative (K.C.C.) and why dairy farmers such as their parents do not get paid anymore for their milk. I tell them that Business [Education] is a

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current subject because it is affected by current happenings. I think the system does not give students a chance to think critically like the former system I went through.

She attributes this way of teaching to the fact that she has to follow closely the syllabus as prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The syllabus demands that she teach the foreign knowledge even though her students do not seem to get it:

> You teach according to the textbook prescribed in the syllabus. Even you as the teacher who has the experience, you might reach a point and you feel... no... this is not true but there is nothing you can do. So you just have to conform with what is written in the text. You see. You know this is not the truth, but you just have to conform, because you are not supposed to go outside [the text]. Because first of all you have to put into consideration the government, the Ministry [education]. You should only teach as per dictated, not what you think.

It is not unusual to hear teachers say that they cannot and do not make important decisions regarding what is taught in their classrooms. They are so bound to the content, methods, resources and time schedule suggested by the Kenya Institute of Education and the Inspectorate that they do not make the responsible professional decisions that they as teachers should make (Omulando, 1992).

> For example, there are teachers who might say "I can't use that textbook because it is not suggested in the syllabus". Teachers who believe that they cannot adjust the syllabus, operate under perceptions that simply do not coincide with reality. (Omulando, 1992, p.222)

This predicament among Kenyan teachers could be attributed to the poor training in college earlier alluded to. As Bishop points out, poorly educated teachers can only teach what they know, and so they cling to the textbook and depend on the narrow, formal framework of the system to give them some sense of security. When in doubt, they fall back on the ways in which they were themselves taught a generation earlier

(Bishop, 1985, p.194). This way of teaching is well exemplified by Wanja when she says that:

> I teach Business Education, what I learnt in my O level because what I learnt in A-level and campus would be too advanced for them. I have to be very basic.

From such experience, asking teachers to take a wider view of society's needs and to adapt their teaching boldly to them is like "snatching the life-jacket from a poor swimmer" (Bishop, 1985, p.194). Again, the conditions of work in the schools are often not conducive to the adoption of new methods and techniques in teaching. The internal organization of the school is sometimes too authoritarian or mechanical, the average headmaster is too indifferent and apathetic, and the facilities are often too poor for the teacher to undertake any kind of creative work (Bishop, 1985). Consequently, the teachers in this research provided their experiences in following the national curriculum guidelines as directed by the Ministry of education through the Kenya Institute of Education and enforced by the inspectorate. In analyzing the perspectives of teachers towards the national curriculum guidelines a number of issues arose which indirectly or indirectly influence what and how teachers teach. The issues that came up included time, rigidity, little or no teacher input, lack of implementation tools/resources, national examinations and politics. The following section will highlight the issues as experienced by my research partners in greater detail.

1) Time

Almost without exception, all teacher participants felt they often work under difficult situations, limited by time. Wanja for instance argues that she does not have much time to

make innovative changes on the syllabus even if she wanted to because she lacks the time

to do so:

> But the time here is the limiting factor. Time, there won't be really enough time for every little discussion, they won't be able to cover the syllabus. Just because the teacher has the fear that if he/she allows such discussions and maybe these discussions are taking place during a time when the students are supposed to be taught something. Now, the teachers fear that if those discussions are allowed, maybe he/she will not be able to cover the syllabus and if she/he will not be able to cover the syllabus by the time the students will be sitting for the exams, the students may get a question from somewhere they had not covered and eventually they will blame the teacher. We hadn't covered the syllabus. So the teacher takes the blame. So probably even the students may not want to discuss anything. Many of them will not in fact want to discuss anything because they have been taught by the system right from nursery school that the teacher is there to present facts and we are there to memorize them. The student is not supposed to think. And the teacher is not supposed to be questioned too much. And I think this is what they believe a good teacher should be. They are indoctrinated....

Wanja and other teachers are expected to cover the entire syllabus within a given time.

Failure to cover this syllabus has dire consequences. The examination council can get

examination questions from any part of the syllabus. It would therefore be suicidal for

any teacher not to cover the syllabus, as she reveals below:

> When you are teaching, there is always this nagging question; have I completed the syllabus? Where have I reached? Even the students think that the completion of the syllabus is much more important than what they are actually getting. They never ask themselves...up to that point what knowledge have I acquired? What have I gained? All they are concerned about is the completion of the syllabus. So we have concentrated on just completing the syllabus. The most important thing is to have the syllabus complete.

In fact, as Mukuria pointed out, they are so obsessed with completing the syllabus that

the school has devised innovative ways of extending school time. For instance, in this

school, they have what they call "holiday coaching." Essentially, holiday coaching should

be whereby students pay some money to the teachers to be coached on one-on-one basis

on the areas they have had difficulties with over the term. However, in this school,

teachers take this time as an opportunity to complete the syllabus, as Mukuria points out

below:

> And you are supposed to cover the syllabus within a given period, let's say for example, one year. But now you find that sometimes I'm unable to cover the syllabus. There is too much work. It cannot be covered maybe in one year. I cannot cover it in the given time. You find that for instance in this school we have to come back for holiday coaching. And in fact, it is not coaching in that sense, but it is just a continuation of the syllabus.

And he further adds:

> So I would also admit that there is shortage of time. Time is too short, time for discussion is not available. But I would also think that we have got poor planning. Because I would imagine that if we had something similar to what we had here [our group discussion], programmed instructions where we may have a set of information within a given period, and there you can examine that student to see whether such a student has achieved your aims or not. If the student has not achieved the aims, you actually repeat that section again, and maybe find out why the student is not getting that information. But the way we teach, we have very little consideration for the effectiveness of our teaching. So I will go to class, give a set of information and most likely I will not take keen interest in knowing whether the students have understood it or not, because I really don't have much time. You will test them in the exam. Really, even after I have given them the exam, and see that they are poor in it I will not take the trouble to identify the problems with my students. This is because the kind of planning which is there does not give room for such things. It doesn't give room for evaluating our effectiveness in teaching. And if we don't evaluate ourselves, we cannot identify with the students. So we are going to see a student who must receive the information that I give, and me as the teacher, I must see/give that information. And that's the end of it.

And as Mukuria points out:

> To me, it seems that the curriculum developers have no concept of time. They don't consider some other factors like extra curricular activities, which actually take so much time. So one of the things we do [to deal with the problem of time] is to extend the term.

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Because of teachers' anxiety to complete the syllabus within a given time, they begin to experience other difficulties in their own teaching. There is the teacher-student ratio, for instance, that Wanja feels is problematic and which she thinks affects the quality of her teaching:

> I think what I can say is that our planning remains poor because of the student teacher ratio. I think that affects the evaluation of the teaching as well as the planning. You see, if the teacher/student ratio was kind of at per, you can be able to know the needs of each and every individual. But in this case, if you are to know the needs of each individual student, it means you would take so much time. So sometimes you see you cannot do that. If I'm to comment, I comment generally on each and every student. Then there is this attitude like if I have, unless I call that student individually, there is no way I can start pin pointing the weaknesses to him/her in class. Because to him/her it would be embarrassing to be told publicly that student x you are failing because 1) you have a problem of spelling mistakes, 2) you are only listing this, you know they will not take it so lightly. I know I need to inform, but that is not the way to inform. So you see because of that issue and the limited time, now once you start planning, sometimes you might plan that today, I want to speak to so, so and so, but you see by the end of the day you have been unable to speak to all those individuals in that class. Because the student/teacher ratio cannot allow for such interruptions.

Wanja goes further to paint the picture of the student-teacher ratio:

> If I'm to teach for the forty minutes, and I ask them a question or a comment related to a certain topic, if they are 40 students or even 30 and each student is supposed to answer at least so that they don't feel left out, you see that is another tendency (the teacher only asks so and so). So you will be left with little time to cover the topic. And sometimes the students you ask will not answer. So you answer in order to save time. So if you are to ask all of them, it means that the lesson will end before you have covered it because it might take an answer per minute. And once an answer is given, of course you add or subtract. You have to comment on that answer, so that by the end of it all, you will realize that one lesson gone and you haven't even covered what you were supposed to cover. What you were supposed to cover you now take it to the next lesson. And at the back of the mind, there is always the syllabus. In fact, that is the most disturbing word, the syllabus. Because they have been made to believe that without the completion of the syllabus, you have been pulled down from the excelling mark.

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The issue of time has affected immensely the way the teachers behave in the classroom. Wanja pointed out that her teaching skills within the present curriculum context does not equip the students with critical thinking skills. She does not encourage the students to participate actively in the classroom. As soon as she asks a question and there is no immediate response, she goes ahead and gives the answer she expected. Thus, the students copy notes and reproduce the same for her in the next exam:

> In fact, the students are not given time to critically think because of the time factor. Because of the examination, the discussions that used to be there for example, you know, now we don't allow for discussions, we don't allow because of the time factor. You see, like the group discussions we used to have...you are asked as a group to go and discuss this or that and then present it to the class and then you are maybe given another approach/perspective and then you get a conclusion. Here, no. Teachers have to do everything. Students are not exposed to such things. We are not exposing the students to critical thinking of course. We don't have time to do that. With the scanty information we have, we just spoon feed them because the time cannot allow us to do otherwise, and the resources too cannot allow wider coverage.

Wanja does not however think that this is the best way to teach. In fact, she feels sorry for the dependency of the students on her as the authority to knowledge, something she confides only happened to her in the earlier stages of schooling, but gradually changed as she went up the education ladder. Her own teachers in A-levels allowed her to explore things by herself, through field trips and other ventures. Wanja had the following to say:

> When I compare this [8-4-4] to the former system I see a lot of difference. Under the old system we were trained to do a lot of work on our own especially in A Level. Under the current system, you have to do everything for them.

Murubu too feels that time is a limiting factor in the way he teaches in the classroom as he points out below:

Apart from the issue of time that we don't have because of the scope of the syllabus, the syllabus expects us to cover so much. If there was [enough] time, there would be no harm in allowing a free discussion and free interaction. There could be no harm. But now you cannot allow too much of that because you will not cover the syllabus. The issue is to cover the syllabus so that they pass. And if they don't pass you will be seen as a failure in your work...And you were taught to view yourself that way...Yes, that's what you were taught by the system. So it would be very difficult for you to get out of that [situation], even if you knew that it is good to give the students a chance to express themselves, you won't do it. Yes you won't do it. Because in the first place that is how you were taught. Exactly. And that is your concept of a good teacher. One who is a dictator. Yes, one who sticks to the books. So you fear that if you give them too much freedom, your students will fail and you will have let them down and by extension, you have failed as a teacher.

So, why should teachers persist in using teaching methods, which are authoritative and coercive, even though they know it is wrong. Wanja, for instance, argues that this way of teaching only produces "characters who cannot think for themselves."

I would just say that we are not allowing them to exhaust what they know fully. So here, we mainly rely on the lecture method, whereby like now I have to consider that I have 40 minutes, and I have the syllabus to complete. So I come in and teach what is most relevant to the exam and up to the point information. Once I do that, I don't have time, in fact sometimes you don't even realize, or even bother to ask them "what do you know? You just ask them to copy notes. You see, we don't give them a chance.... and when we ask them questions and they keep on keeping quiet on that subject, you just move on to another topic because you don't have the time. Or you can't tell them to go and research, by maybe reading other books as well as asking other people. No we don't. You will find that it is more of teacher oriented and students will realize that they are not supposed to challenge the teacher authority Instead of the learner oriented where there is discussion, there is demonstration for example, you let them for example have something like a kit there, right in front of the class, you know, for better understanding. So you find now that it is the students sit and the teacher do what they want.

Time is a big issue in as far as teaching is concerned. While the syllabus prescribed make certain demands on the way teaching should be done, it does little to provide time for

any maneuvers, neither does it allow the teachers to concentrate on certain parts. As the teachers pointed out, the national examination can come from any part of the syllabus, which leaves little time for the teachers to do much else besides completing the syllabus

2) National Examinations

Professor Fafunwa argues that the undue importance given to examinations and certificates in English-speaking Africa is so alarming that one wonders whether what we have in most countries of Africa today can be called a system of education or a system of examinations (in Bishop, 1985). This observation is very true of the place of National examinations and certificates in Kenya today. Indeed, the United Kingdom as early as 1952 enumerated the defects of examinations, as Beeby pointed out:

> The national examinations dictate the curriculum instead of following it, prevent any experimentation, hamper the proper treatment of subjects and sound methods of teaching, foster a dull uniformity rather than originality, encourage the average pupil to concentrate too rigidly upon too narrow a field and thus help him/her to develop wrong values in education. Pupils assess education in terms of success in examinations. Teachers recognizing the importance of external examination to the individual pupils, are constrained to relate their teaching to an examination which can test only a narrow field of the pupil's interests and capacities and so inevitably neglect qualities which are more important though less tangible. (cited in Bishop, 1985, p.226)

And as Eshiwani (1993) argues, the Kenyan curriculum is "narrow in scope and emphasizing the role of learning for passing national examinations to acquire certificates" (p. 30).

Almost without exception, the teachers felt that the curriculum guidelines they receive from the Ministry of Education and the consequent demands of the national

examinations affect in a big way the teaching strategies they adopt. The frustration with these kind of demands was well summarized by Mukuria when he said:

> For one it is important to finish the syllabus otherwise we'll be disadvantaged and this leaves little time for much else. I think this contributes to the students' lack of interest in education. The syllabus is exam oriented. The teacher does not teach much else other than the syllabus for fear that they'll be left behind which will consequently lead to failure.

Examinations can be useful tools in an educational system, but they should never be allowed to become its master. The curriculum should dictate the contents and objectives of examinations. As Bishop argues, it is "unsound educational practice to allow an examination to determine what students need to learn and hence, what they should be taught" (1985, p.226). And as Murubu puts it so rightly:

> And so I end up doing the wrong thing all through. We know very well we are teaching information that is irrelevant. I think our education system is all flawed. It is something that just feeds information, and when the exam comes, you are supposed to pass. And then you are recognized as somebody in the society. Not that you gain useful knowledge. As long as you are able to reproduce what is required and you acquire a certificate, then you are ok.

With a curriculum that concentrates on imparting only the knowledge that will be tested in a national exam, it is no wonder that certificates become the top priority and almost the sole determinant in the job market. Candidates reproduce almost a carbon copy of what they were prepared to do and the national examination council rewards generously those who re-produce the expected materials best with social status and a certificate to proceed to the university. Those who fail to re-produce the materials to the expectation of the examination council are pushed aside and labeled as 'failures'.

3) Rigid Curriculum Guidelines

The lack of flexibility in the curriculum guidelines is problematic and affects the way teachers teach in a big way. Mwingi, for instance, has a problem with the rigidity in which the syllabus is presented to them as teachers. He suggests that the syllabus should be flexible enough to deal with the problems that teachers identify on day-to-day basis. He gives the example of the problem of drug abuse among students. In the present syllabus, the teacher is unable to address this problem in depth even though it is obvious that a student may be having difficulties in the classroom because of other non-related anti-social behavior. With a flexible curriculum, a teacher would probably spend sometime in understanding the student behavior, and with the help of the parents or other community resource people, help the student to kick off a bad habit and resume the class activities. In the present circumstances though, Mwingi admitted that they often dismiss such students from the classroom and are even much happier when the head teacher expels the student. This obviously is a waste of resources and not to mention that such a student is a threat to the same society that has produced him/her.

Wanja too feels frustrated because of the rigidity of the curriculum guidelines:

> We as teachers follow the syllabus and we are told this is the way to go. And is not up to us to start cutting our own paths the way we feel like, you know. That I can tell them today, lets see how we can earn money. We can cook mandazi (doughnuts) and make some money. I can teach them ways of earning money but you see there is something you have to follow, and that is what we call curriculum. You have to follow that. So I think the whole problem has come about because of our curriculum. So I have to tell the students in Murang'a even if there is never a time that they will see a dollar, they have to know a certain country exist with something similar to a shilling but called the dollar though they will never use it. You see, that is where the whole problem starts. Because you tell them about things they might never use, things they might never experience or even encounter.

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Mwingi suggests that the syllabus should respect and encourage individual talents. Because of the limited time allocated to activities outside classroom such as scouting, young farmers, drama that would help the students to interact with the community members and acquire useful skills for survival are not encouraged in the syllabus. Neither are sports. Those students who spend time on these extra-curricula activities are often chastised by their parents and teachers. And they are frowned upon by their fellow students.

4) Lack of Teacher Input in Curriculum Planning

The centralization of curriculum planning in Kenya restricts the participation of teachers in curriculum activities. What Kenyan curriculum planners fail to acknowledge is that no genuine innovation occurs unless the teachers are personally committed to ensuring its success. As Bishop argues, innovation must start at the teachers' level. In the final analysis, it is they who operationalize the innovation at the classroom level (1985, p.189):

> A curriculum is only as good as the quality of its teachers. Positively, a curriculum is enriched by the creativity and imagination of the best teachers; negatively it is vitiated by the limitations of poor teachers and poor teacher training. (Bishop, 1985, p.190)

In the last analysis, any curriculum reform comes through decisions by the teachers in the classroom. They know the local situation, the local dynamics. Unless teachers are available and willing to participate in curriculum development, there is no future for it. That is why they must be totally involved in the curriculum development process (Bishop, 1985).

However, my research partners felt that the present curriculum is planned with little or no teacher input. Ngeche, for instance, points out that "even while saying that this is the way we have been taught, I think even our own planning I believe is very poor." As far as the teachers are concerned, the syllabus is wide and unmanageable because the syllabus planners have no experiential knowledge of classroom practices partly because they have never set foot in a classroom, or they were there a long time ago. As Murubu observes:

> Perhaps the system in Kenya, the people in the field [i.e. teachers] are not given enough space to put forward their views or to air their views. They do not have any forum or a chance to air their views concerning the present kind of system or curriculum if you want to call it that. The problem I think is with the planners. The planning is very poor. We are not given any chance to feed back those people in the ministry [education]. To make them aware that their planning have been effective or not. How good their planning has been. Now the people in the field have to be given more chances to air their views about the effectiveness of the system or the curriculum that they are practicing in the field. That chance is just not there for those people in the classrooms. And it is a failure on the part of the planners again. Therefore, they do not put into account the time spent on x-curricular activities.

Murubu explains further why this continues to happen:

> I see it partly that it [failure] is there because these planners or those people in the ministry [education], K.I.E and those high places are again brought up in the same education system where they say, "we are the planners and you people down there in the field, you will have to go with whatever we have planned. Whether it is good or bad, you should not question us." The same, same type of education we have been brought up in is the same for the planners. The moment you try to question them, they will not be friendly to you, no matter how good your suggestion might be.

Ngeche too sees the problem as rooted in the planners:

> I was thinking about those people who are supposed to see that teaching is effective: the inspectors. If you should look at the behavior of those people it leaves a lot to be desired. In fact, they are hostile. And if they came around, until recently when they changed slightly, they used to see

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themselves as the "know-it-all." And they used to see a teacher as an errant person who should always be reprimanded, and somebody who should not question their conduct. And that has created a very big gap between the Inspectorate and the teacher in classroom. Such that the two people are distant, are actually parallel whereas you would expect that in fact, they should be working closely together. So that the Inspectorate can get correct feedback. But this not what we actually do. And many times because the teacher knows that the inspector is a bully will actually hide relevant information and gives that one which the teacher knows is going to impress the inspectors. So you see if the inspector came around and asked for my scheme of work I'm going to give it. But that day, if you look at it, and question it slightly, you may ask, "this [scheme of work] mwalimu looks very ideal. Are you sure this is what you are using?" Well I would try my best to convince you that is the way I do it. But if you would look at my behavior in class, it is totally different from what is actually there. Other times, I may for whatever reasons, perhaps genuine reasons, I may not have achieved a certain goal, and I know that I'm supposed to do it, as per the instructions on the syllabus says. I'm supposed to do them. So in such an incident, when the inspector comes around, instead of imagining that I should explain to the inspector why I have been unable to achieve what is required I will just disappear. I'll know that this man will just put me into trouble. So I will just run away. And that's the end of it. So we end up hiding very important information. So there is very little communication between the Inspectorate and the teachers/implementers.

Wanja agrees with him:

> Yes...there is little communication if any. And so we end up teaching/feeding our students' irrelevant information. So the student ends up being the receptacle because I know that this information is of no benefit to the student. I know that the way I'm doing it is wrong. In short, the syllabus planners have lost touch with the culture of the school.

If the teachers were allowed to participate in curriculum making, they would effect certain changes. Ngeche would like to see more emphasis laid on things that are locally available:

> I would make it practical oriented but the practical part would be what is found in the students' environment. Because even though they learn about the microscope in the practical they may never use it when they return home to their villages. And you see, since the facilities are there, they

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should be used to produce some thing relevant. But unfortunately we are not the curriculum developers, our job is to implement what we get and even if we tell the curriculum developers that we could do better and they don't take us seriously, we do the best we can. Produce graduates who are not any better at home than at school.

If there was proper evaluation and the teachers input was allowed, some of the things they are asked to teach would be removed from the syllabus:

> Because for instance if you imagine this topic talking about the cell, teach the student about the cell. And the student goes out there...how much of cell biology is the student going to apply? Very little if any. Why not introduce a topic like diseases in food crops and put a lot of emphasis on that so that when this student leave school, he/she will grow cabbages, carrots and he/she will know the diseases that affect those crops and how they can be controlled without necessarily going for expensive chemicals. But if a student comes here in a biology lesson, a lot of cell biology is [emphasized]. There is a lot of plant and animal physiology, which the student is not going to use [when they leave school].

Teaching of things that students are not likely to use when they leave school is what Ngeche sees as the failure of some of the objectives of the curriculum, which is meant to equip the students with practical skills to use at home:

> That is why you see the student alright is supposed to be practical oriented but if you get these graduates, the practical knowledge they gathered they are not putting it into practice because once they go outside there and they see the things which are actually happening in their home are not the things they learnt. The school and the home become two parallel things and there is little effort made to merge the two. They [home and school] are separate entities. They are very separate.

And even when it is made, there is little or no evaluation as Ngeche points out:

> What is even more frustrating is that no one seems to care about how teachers are dealing with certain topics in the field. There is nothing I would call evaluation from an education point of view. There isn't. For all these years I have been teaching [over 10 years] I have never seen anyone come to evaluate the success in curriculum implementation, which indicates that the students are evaluated on how much they have memorized. So the evaluation itself is poor. And if it is poor, there is no evaluation because somebody is supposed to find out what is wrong with it and if you are told by whoever is teaching that certainly this one is wrong

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and we can do better if we did this one, you are supposed to take it and see how you can perhaps change things for the better.

As a result of teaching irrelevant information the student becomes an " indifferent listener, a passive participant who listens, records, memorizes and reproduces" (Mukuria). What is even worse is that the teachers do not assess their teaching methods as Ngeche points out:

> But we hardly assess whether this is the wrong or the right thing. And we continue doing the wrong thing because whoever is supposed to worry about it does not care. And that is why we are saying that the educational planners do not care about my experiences with the learners. And all they are concerned about is that I have done it [what they planned]. And that being the case, we end up teaching irrelevant information. Because the system of evaluating the effectiveness of the educational system is wrong.

> Take the case of the 8-4-4 system for instance. You would imagine that when the 8-4-4 system was introduced, we were supposed to have evaluated it. And made the necessary adjustment. There are times when the syllabus has been reviewed, somebody comes and says, people are complaining about the 8-4-4 system and then we hear that the syllabus has been reviewed. But if you would go and look at it critically, the review that was done was not effective. And perhaps sometimes it makes things worse. Because somebody will go and extract [some information]. Because one of the complaints has been that the syllabus is very broad. So somebody just gets the syllabus and extracts a chunk of information, without bothering to find out whether such information is vital. And you end up reducing the load all right, but the relevance of the material which was left there is highly questionable.

> Just like the two times the biology syllabus has been reviewed. I noted that they actually removed information that is better and practical for the students and left, some of which is highly academic. So you see they removed applied biology, and left a lot of academic biology. So you would wonder, whoever was reviewing this biology, could they not see that it is much better to teach these students about personal hygiene, things like environmental conservation etc, instead of teaching these students things like applied genetics etc. Things that this student may never use... just as Wanja was saying a while ago, that you are teaching the student about the dollar and you know the student will never use that dollar.

Teachers feel that if they are directly involved in the process of curriculum making, more relevant information would be taught to the students. Ngeche for instance feels frustrated by the review that has recently been done on biology:

> Here we are, we remove things about environmental hygiene, and start teaching things like genes and chromosomes. Surely, the kind of students we have may never have the direct use of such things. And you might have done that student a better service if you have taught that student "this is the way to preserve food, this is the way you can control diseases in you environment etc". So, poor evaluation leads to poor planning, and poor content selection in the syllabus.

And so the teacher ends up shouldering the burden of implementing a syllabus that they had no part in developing. Ngeche for instance would have offered the following information if he had been consulted when the biology syllabus was recently reviewed:

> I would have advised them "remove this one on genes and mutation and preserve this one on environmental conservation". So you can imagine a student having gone through biology in secondary school and does not have any knowledge or experience regarding soil conservation or such kind of a thing. That is very interesting. In that syllabus there is nothing like soil conservation. There isn't even the study of the soil itself. Yet we keep on saying that agriculture is the backbone of our economy. And here we are not teaching such students anything to do with the soil.

5) Implementation Tools/Resources

Curriculum design becomes curriculum proper when it is adopted in the classroom. If there is to be change and improvement in education, there must be adequate resources for the job. Teachers preoccupied with the immediacy of the classroom, coping with large and sometimes difficult classes, need to have at hand the tools for the job (Bishop, 1985, p.212). But in Kenya, there is always a mismatch between the "official" curriculum and the "actual" one. What happens inside the classroom depends on students' preparedness, textbooks, material and human resources necessary for implementation. Ngeche points out this when he provides the following view:

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As a teacher, I often find challenges in dealing with our present curriculum. In teaching biology for instance, I find that some of the principles in it are good, the problem is how to implement it in terms of materials, personnel and the students themselves.

5.a) <u>Student Preparedness</u>

Ngeche feels that the level of preparedness for students before they come to secondary school has a lot to do with how they are taught. He provides the following insight:

> The students are not prepared for something practical oriented, which requires them to manipulate the environment they are in, in the process of learning. These students have been doing theory from std. 1 and the curriculum now demand they become practical oriented. Form 1 students find it hard in practical because in primary school, the facilities required to do practical such as test tubes, a simple burner, solutions to test are not available The student is expected to have mastered this information before coming to form 1. As such, the students who go to secondary schools are not prepared in the practical sense. They learn through rote.

Because of the lack of adequate preparation on the part of the students, Ngeche finds himself using some methods that he would otherwise not use.

> I had a biology class this morning with a form 1 class and I had to go for a fish because they did not know the basic things I expected them to know about a fish. I told them to look at the mouth. What is if for? eating. And plants, do they eat? Yes. They make food in their leaves. At least they had learnt this apparently but they cannot explain how from there we conclude that all living things must eat (feed). I told them to look at the fish again. It has fins, what are they for? "For moving". Living things move. What about plants? "They do not move". But somebody ought to have told them that if you place a plant in a dark place it will grow towards the light. Therefore, though their movement is limited, they exhibit growth movements. Because of having to repeat things that the students are expected to have covered in primary school, I find that it is hard to cover the secondary syllabus. One, the student is poorly prepared, two, we don't have the facilities. So I will teach a lot of theory and produce students who will not be practical oriented and I will therefore not meet the curriculum objective.

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Mwingi pointed out that the present stratification of school, whereby the bright students are put into certain schools (government funded public schools) and the remaining students are put into schools such as this one (harambee schools), has a lot to do with the present teaching methods. Students in this kind of schools have already internalized the fact that they are weak and the parents, community members and even some teachers constantly reinforce that belief. It would therefore be close to a miracle to expect such students to have much hope in the learning process or even to think that they can contribute anything worthwhile or knowledgeable. It is no wonder that he concludes:

> It is true. I think they use a system that is outdated for us. It is not our system. Because if it was our system, it would address itself to our needs and to our own problems. I think it is time that people got together and decided what it is we really need.

Wanja also thinks that one of the reasons teachers are unable to deal with anti-social behavior is because teachers are no longer respected by their students as much as in the past. She attributes this factor to the fact that teachers are seen as disciplinarian. Right from nursery school the students are indoctrinated to the fact that they can acquire knowledge only if they are subjected to corporal punishments. She gave an example of a song that her nursery-going neighbor sings at home:

> Mwalimu uhure
> na uthomithie wega.

Loosely translated as:

> Please teacher cane me
> So long as you teach me well.

A brief analysis of this nursery rhyme shows how coercive teaching methods are privileged in this community. The students believe that the only way to acquire knowledge is through caning. In secondary school, though, the students are too big to be

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disciplined with a mere cane and so the punishments take bigger proportions that equally erode the confidence of the students to their teachers. Thus, Wanja concludes that the present school syllabus does not allow teacher/student interaction, which would form a basis of friendship with the students. They cannot develop relationships that are long lasting. It is as if the syllabus planners deliberately refuse to incorporate play so that teachers become detached and alienated from their students.

5.b) Lack of Human Resources

Human resources necessary for the implementation of curriculum are among the things the teachers are currently lacking. Wanja for instance would like to use more local resources. In teaching a unit regarding retail in commerce, for instance, she would invite the local shopkeeper who would explain to the students first hand experience the dynamics of running a retail shop. The shopkeeper would explain to the students the reasons for wanting to start a retail shop, the day-to-day experiences, the difficulties encountered. By so doing, the students can relate these experiences to the general economy of the country as an extension of their own community. However Wanja points out:

> In the present context, the community members and parents are alienated from the learning process. They believe that the teachers know everything and the only knowledge worth learning is the book knowledge. The student for instance may not see the significance of knowing about that foreign exchange because they may never get that dollar in their life so as to go and exchange it. Yet it is all there in the textbook...or the syllabus demands that they learn such things. Whereas if they were taught something else that is more immediate for example, about the shilling and how to get it, they may be in a better position to participate even in the classroom.

My research partners cited the problem of lacking resource people to reinforce the information the teacher has. In teaching foreign exchange rates in commerce, for instance, Wanja would like to invite a local bank personnel as a resource person. That way, the students will appreciate what they are doing in the classroom as an extension of what concerns they will have in future. However, the bureaucracy that would surround such a visit often discourages such a teacher. It would require clearance from a number of personnel within/out of school so that, by the time it happens, the teacher is fatigued and discouraged. And this has not taken into consideration the banker's reluctance to participate in school activities, some of which may be interpreted as political.

Mwingi too has a problem with lack of resource people. He points out that the syllabus and the school in the present context neglects the role of the first teacher of the child: *the parent*. He further pointed out that good teaching practices would be where the teacher is able to teach from the perspective of the first teacher. This particular way of teaching would help the student appreciate their parents' way of life. However, the syllabus in the present context alienates the students from their parents' practices.

This way of teaching was well exemplified by Wanja's own personal experience with her mother's cooking. Her mother had been used to mixing up meat, vegetables, potatoes all in one pot and serving it with ugali, rice, or chapati, which she concluded was "primitive cooking" according to her new knowledge in a home science class. In this class, she had been convinced that the "right way" of cooking, and probably *the* only way is when all these foods are cooked and served as different dishes. She therefore demanded (not too kindly) that her mother adopt the new way. In other words, the home culture has to change, to accommodate her way. This narrow-minded way of thinking

obviously breeds alienation and such students become outcasts in their own homes. By so doing, such an individual begins to evade responsibilities, particularly if the parents refuse to adapt her ways.

Mwingi too feel that the syllabus should move beyond the book knowledge. For instance in teaching about cooperative societies in geography, students would begin by learning about the local co-operative society in which their parents are members. This will enable the students to understand the basics from their own parents or people who are close to them. That way, they will begin to see the connection between the home and the school before they are introduced to the more complex concepts regarding national or international co-operative societies. Wanja suggested that she would like the community members to feel that they are part and parcel of the learning process. When community members feel like they are part of the school, they can participate in some areas as resource people.

5.c) Lack of Material Resources

Lack of material resources was identified as another major source of the current teaching practices. Particularly the lack of suitable textbooks and appropriate equipment was cited as a major drawback. The following section highlights the details:

i) Textbooks

The textbook is the key classroom teaching aid in schools throughout the world, says Harber (1989). He further argues that textbooks transmit socio-political values not just openly but also by "omission, biased presentation of 'facts' or indirectly when the values are hidden in an exercise or task to be done" (1989, p.43). In a study done on some textbooks used in Kenyan classroom, he found some discrepancy between some national

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goals and the values emphasized in the textbook. For instance, "children should be able to

blend the best of traditional values with the changed requirements that must follow rapid

development" (Harber, 1989, p.46). However, the emphasis on the textbooks examined is

very much upon modern. In the *Safari English Course* (Book 1-3), for example, people

are portrayed in "modern" occupations 60 times – the most important being teacher,

police officer and nurse, while "traditional" occupations feature only 22 times (e.g.

farmer, tailor, shopkeeper). In this series, people are almost always pictured in modern

dress. When traditional and modern ways of life meet it is the traditional that must adapt

to develop:

> Nowadays, the Maasai are making plans to develop their own country both
> in Kenya and Tanzania. They are improving their grazing lands. They are
> sinking boreholes to get water. More and more children are going to
> school. Maasai Ministers join the Government and there are Maasai
> District officers and District Commissioners. (Curtis, cited in Harber,
> 1989, p.47)

Indeed, one book (Young and Lowry) identifies the Maasai as one of the four

"problems" of livestock farming in East Africa along with climate, soil and disease:

> The pastoral tribes care little for quality; the numbers of cattle in their
> herds mean more to the owners than their condition. Thus, in many
> districts, large herds of worthless cattle are steadily ruining more and more
> pastureland by overgrazing. (p.92, cited in Harber, 1989, p.47)

It is no wonder that teacher after teacher described the prescription of certain

textbooks in the syllabus as being problematic. Thus, the only knowledge imparted is

book knowledge which in most cases contain content that is not local in orientation. The

students therefore have limited resources in which to draw examples from. Wanja, for

instance, shared her experience teaching supermarkets, a small section in the commerce

syllabus. For students in a school that is rural based like this one, a supermarket is

unknown. Except for a few students who may have visited the big urban cities like Nairobi, a majority of the students will only use their imagination to visualize a supermarket, and heavily rely on teacher's knowledge (probably what she herself has obtained from textbooks), of what supermarkets are and how they operate. Beside the use of certain textbooks, Mukuria pointed out the lack of Kenyan authors within the prescribed texts in the syllabus. For example, the set books for literature, both in Kiswahili and English, are mainly authored by non-local people. This is not to say that there are no Kenyan authors who have raised important issues for discussion. Instead, the syllabus prescribes texts from mainly Tanzania for Kiswahili and West and South Africa for English, and sometimes these are translated from other countries outside Africa. Mukuria, for instance, gets frustrated by some of the prescribed textbooks he is expected to teach in Fasihi (Kiswahili literature):

> There are some set books that are written by Europeans and have been translated into Kiswahili language such as *Shamba la Wanyama* (*Animal Farm*) and it is sometimes hard for the students to understand the context. *Animal Farm* is set in Russia and the students find it hard to relate to it; the power struggle between Lenin and Trotsky. It is hard to relate this to the African context. Although the context of power struggle still relates to the African setting the problem comes in because with translation the theme of the story changes somehow and one who has read the original book may find it different from the translation.

The prescription of foreign texts is not limited to English and Kiswahili. Subject after subject has to contend with foreign and prescribed textbooks. As Mwingi points out:

> Sometimes we are so much involved in feeding the students with facts from textbook, such that the primary aim of the teacher is to cover the syllabus in the shortest period. Taking this into account and you want to cover the syllabus, what you are fighting for is to feed the students, get the students as fast as possible what will come in the exam [national], not mainly what would be of usage in their own immediate environment. Because as a teacher, you are put to task, that you need to cover the

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syllabus such that the overall aim is to have the students pass the exams. And you as the teacher yours is to complete the work given to you by the ministry and the Teacher Service Commission. In that case, you have the appropriate knowledge, but you are not allowed to benefit the students...your hands are tied by the curriculum requirements.

Over reliance on the textbook brings about other problems. These books are not frequently updated and, even if they are, the schools cannot afford to buy new textbooks every year. So you find that the students are fed with false information:

First of all, I'm supposed to teach a topic. The topic is in the syllabus. But there is no information in any of the texts we are using. I have to seek my own information. And you see the way the students have been used to relying on the textbook.

She further adds:

You see, the book we are using now was written before banking was liberalized. Anything to do with foreign exchange was done through the central bank. But now, even the revised textbooks have not put that into account. I think it is only the cover that indicates that the book has been revised. Inside the book, there is not even any additional information about such changes.

So when the teacher takes the initiative to add new information which she has gathered from current periodicals, the students get confused:

But then, this information is not in their textbook. You see what I was saying is not in the book. You as the teacher will tell them. But the book will still have the gap. It will still have the gap because it is not updated with correct information or the additional information. The additional information is still lacking today. If this information was in their revised text, it would reinforce their understanding. But you see, this textbook is written by a non-local person whose first aim of selling the book is profit margin. It is not written by a teacher who is affected. (Wanja)

No wonder, as Wanja points out, Malkiat Sigh, an Asian commercial book producer, seems to be the only known author of textbooks in Kenya. Yet, there are hundreds if not thousands of Kenyan authors in the market, but who for some reasons are not prescribed for the syllabus. Ngeche too identifies the over reliance on textbooks as a

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problem. He thinks that Kenya Institute of Education (K.I.E) should not have the monopoly of producing textbooks for schools. This is because some of the information they provide is outdated. "They are not up-to date with current research" (Ngeche). For example, "some chemicals in agriculture such as D.D.T which have already been declared to be harmful to human beings and is therefore withdrawn from the international market is still a recommended chemical in the current K.I.E agriculture textbooks," Ngeche points out.. This is to say that Kenyan students are being fed with false information, and the teacher who may have more current information faces the contradiction of providing the current information, confusing the students who still rely in most part with the text books, and making them "at risk" for failure in the next national exam. Consequently, the students not only lack appropriate examples to use to participate in the classroom effectively but they stand a high chance of failing.

ii) <u>Equipment</u>

Ngeche considers that the curriculum expects them to teach some concepts using expensive and sometimes unnecessary teaching aids. Listen to some of his views:

> If I had a say in the way curriculum is developed in this country, I would suggest that we trim the current syllabus down to something within our financial reach because some of the things we are required to use are simply beyond our means. It would be all right to let it be practical oriented but change the approach. We should not go for very expensive equipment or put section which require very expensive equipment which schools like this one can barely afford. Take for instance the microscope. One microscope costs about ksh15,000. A class of 40 students will require 20 microscopes, [which adds up to ksh300,000] which is very expensive. That is required for one topic in biology. In the syllabus, there are so many cases like this one where the syllabus demand a particular practical but the facility to use for that practical is too expensive and beyond the limits of the school. So I think that the syllabus should be trimmed down to be within the financial limits of the school.

Ngeche further pointed out that one of the reasons they have for using poor teaching methods is lack of adequate material resources. In teaching chemistry in a school where there is no equipment in which students can observe chemical reactions, teachers often teach by rote, that is, having the students copy notes and cram them later for the exam without ever having seen the inside of a lab. Thus, the teacher in his/her role as facilitator finds it impossible to allow creativity and initiative. This is not to say that the teachers themselves are keen on allowing students creativity and initiative. They often teach from a narrow perspective because they are equally anxious about having the students pass the national exam because of the prestige and rewards that such an achievement brings. Because of teaching from such a perspective, the students lack motivation to learn, their intellect is not challenged, which makes them become dormant and inactive. Ngeche suggests that one way of meeting such a challenge is to:

> teach things that the student is going to be exposed to after school. So that we stop this academic business where you are talking about the dollar and you know very well that this student will never see a dollar. Even I (the teacher) may never see one. I might be teaching them but I don't even know how a dollar looks like or even a sterling pound. Because unless I have business dealing with this currency, I cannot just have them. And then if at all [such things] are going to be taught, there should be enough resources. If you are going to teach about the dollar, then you should make these available to the students, even if it is in a specimen form, at least you have seen them. Or they should warn about the obstacles dealing with such topic so that the teachers will know how to deal with such issues. But now when you go to class, the students just look at you, yet they have to cram what you teach because all they want is to pass the exam. For them, it is to pass the exam and not how applicable that knowledge is to their life.

6) Politics in Curriculum Planning

Almost without exception, all teachers felt that the curriculum in its present form is failing the students. It does not exploit their potential to the maximum and it is producing people who have no practical skills to enable them to function in their own environment. Because of the influence of politicians on the education curriculum planners it is hard for a curriculum to be adopted that does not meet with the approval of the politicians, who often have ulterior motives behind its adoption. Murubu points out that our present political leaders went through the colonial educational system, which we still have today. Continuing with it is a form of neo-colonialism because through it our former masters are able to dictate to us especially "when we approach them for foreign aid" (Murubu). Perhaps they retain it because they need their interests to be perpetuated. Because of lack of political will to make effective and lasting curriculum changes, what we have now is not just irrelevant, rigid and textbook dependent, but also does not make economic sense. Murubu for instance feels that there is a mismatch between the curriculum objectives as far as the societal needs are concerned with what eventually get into the classroom through government directives:

> They defend it by saying that those who prepare it are ex-teachers but I think a lot of sections in it are not related with what is taught in schools, one possibility behind its preparation is political, to satisfy the desires of the political leaders of the day. Like the directive to teach Shakespeare in literature.[7]

This way of teaching is what makes Mwingi add:

> I feel that the entire education system should be overhauled, or other avenues should be sought for those who complete school and fail to proceed to high school.

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[7] Teaching of Shakespeare *Romeo and Juliet* was a directive given by the president to the Minister of Education during a public rally.

As far as Mwingi is concerned, failure to do so has dire consequences:

> There is a feeling of hopelessness for such students particularly those who got the lowest grades. They have little possibility of foreseeing a bright future...a future that she will get a job and improve her lifestyle. This is because our system keeps hammering to them that if they fail the exams, they are failures in life. So, what is now affecting us is the system itself. This system that labels people as failures when they don't attain certain grades.

And as Murubu summarizes these sentiments, "the curriculum adopted should be one that helps the society, its development should involve directly those people in the field particularly teachers because they are in a better position to understand the needs of the students."

Instead of me sitting in my privileged cultural setting to "scrutinize" and consequently "silence" the teachers, I listened to/ talked to/shared with the teachers the knowledge they had about what is happening in their classrooms. That way, they were able to understand the principles behind and the reasons for the curriculum change I was advocating. As Professor Fafunwa points out, if the curriculum in Africa is to be drastically changed, as many people seem to agree, "the change can occur more realistically and more effectively only if the teacher is fully involved in the process of change, and to be fully involved, he must be fully oriented as to the why and wherefore of the change" (cited in Bishop, 1985, p.192). This way of doing research was also based on the premise that "no change in practice, no change in curriculum has any meaning unless the teacher understands it and accepts it" (Bishop, 19985, p.192). The teachers in this project must have fully appreciated the philosophy underlying the change because they were ready to take action.

It is safe to say from this description that the teachers in this study were able to articulate clearly what they know about curriculum. However, through dialogue, conversations, discussion, creation of discourse and reflections, they were able to move beyond merely articulating what they know about curriculum to theorizing about it. This enabled them to transform their social reality through action as is described in the chapter that follows.

CHAPTER 5

TEACHERS TAKE ACTION

Participatory action research encourages researchers to collaborate with people in the research context on the interpretation of data. Kushner and Norris (1980) argue that the task of understanding can only be successfully pursued when provisions are made for people to "move from merely articulating what they know (i.e., providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e., creating meaning)" (p.27). This final part of the research process was an engagement with data, where the teachers gave meaning to their experiences through discussions, discourses and personal reflection. This part of the research process was important because the perspective of the teachers can only be effective if they are not forced into preconceived academic methodologies of categorizing knowledge (St. Denis, 1989, p.38). Teachers interpreting the data from their perspective was important to me because I had made a commitment that teachers will gain access to "scientific" methods of generating knowledge about their world "so that they can make the necessary changes in their world as they see it" (St. Denis, 1979, p.41). I also had a commitment to bring my research partners into the process of knowledge generation by taking the epistemological position that places the importance on:

a) experiential knowing that emerges through participation with others;

b) beliefs that people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their actions within it (Reason, 1994).

Because of this personal commitment to develop a dialogic relationship with my research partners, all I had to do was "provide these individuals with a lens through which they could see themselves, become aware of new ideas, or recognize concepts they were

intuitively acting upon but that lacked clear articulation" (Goodman, 1991, p.179). It is within this framework that my research partners began to assume responsibility for their teaching practices, which consequently encouraged them to take action.

Teachers Face the Challenge of Change

Through discussions and self-reflection, teachers felt that they could no longer sit back while the planners ask them to implement irrelevant information which is not useful to the students. The teachers had come to realize that curriculum as developed for Kenyan schools puts a cultural barrier between the children and their community. This means that on leaving school, students find it difficult to re-integrate with the people among whom they are expected to interact for the rest of their life. Kenyan curriculum is too academic and functionally irrelevant when the students go home to the villages whose members still live a traditional way of life in part. As Ngeche points out, "we should teach things that the student is going to be exposed to after school, so that we stop this academic business where you are asking about a dollar and you know very well that this student will never see a dollar." A truly relevant curriculum, such as Ngeche would like to see implemented, implies a restructuring of the present system that revolves around disciplines to one that will analyze community needs and then address them through the use of relevant curriculum materials. This idea of restructuring the curriculum resonates with Eisner's (1979) social adaptation and social reconstruction orientation to the curriculum. In this orientation, Eisner argues that curriculum derives its aim and content from an analysis of the society the school is designed to serve:

> Schools are essentially institutions created to serve the interests of the society. As such, their mission is to locate social needs, or at least to be sensitive to those needs, and to provide the kinds of programs that are relevant for meeting the needs that have been identified. (Eisner, 1979, p.62)

Ngugi (1986) talks about decolonizing the mind in reference to literary writing. In the same way, the teachers in this study felt that curriculum needs to be decolonized if it is to begin to address the needs of Kenyan people, as Ngeche point out below:

> We have to change the attitude. We have to change our thinking. And I think this is what would involve decolonizing our thinking and our attitude. Basically I see Kenyans as people who are colonialists in themselves. In our own small world, each one of us is a colonialist.

This way of thinking about curriculum concurs with Eisner's argument that curriculum should aim at "developing levels of critical consciousness among children and youth so that they become aware of the kinds of ills that the society has, and become motivated to learn how to alleviate them" (1979, p.63). Murubu summarizes this way of thinking when he says:

> And also perhaps teachers should make a deliberate effort to change their attitudes towards students. Because I know that is a big problem. Anytime you see a student, you don't trust their actions, and you have no confidence in that person. So you see the student as somebody who is immature, incapable of taking care of him/herself or coming up with concrete ideas.

Changing the attitude towards students is important because, as Ngeche argues, if we are able to see them as normal or complete human beings who are capable of critical thinking, and we allow them a chance of expressing themselves, to express their feelings, we will be in a position to show them that the kind of education they are being exposed to has certain limitations. They will need to gather relevant information from certain areas:

> So for instance if I have a close relationship with my students, I will be able to tell them. Look the syllabus says we complete this part, and this is what we will be examined on. But do you note that we have not been

given a chance to study the soil? And the student will see it. So I can ask the students 'go read on your own about the soil.' This time around, not because you will be examined on it but because you require that information when you leave school.

What Ngeche and other teachers are saying here is that we have to re-define education so that it becomes a means of knowledge about ourselves and about the things that are important to us. This can only be achieved through a search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to our selves in the universe (Ngugi, 1986). We should re-orient ourselves towards placing our culture in the center so that other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation and their contributions towards understanding ourselves (Ngugi, 1986). This may be how Mukuria suggests other teachers should be sensitized:

> Perhaps when teachers attend seminars at the district and zonal levels, they can discuss some of these problems and try to see whether they can begin to make the materials they teach more relevant to the lives of the students after school. In such a way that the student will be able to use the knowledge learnt at school.

This way of thinking about curriculum would mean that materials are presented from a cultural perspective. The students are first exposed to their physical and cultural environment as the "mirror in which to observe themselves in relation to the outside world" (Ngugi, 1986, p.89). Viewing curriculum from this perspective would encourage teachers to be more actively involved in community activities, as Ngeche points out:

> It is good for teachers to be active participants in community activities. This tendency in which the teacher is seen as a special person who cannot be bothered by community activities, that one should go. And teachers should make a deliberate effort to know exactly what the needs of the immediate community, that one surrounding the school that is. So that he/she can be able to guide the student on how to handle their problems. And that way we are going to have a situation whereby, the student and the teacher have got similar objectives. Such that when they come to discussing issues in the class, or when the teacher is giving examples in

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the class he will be able to pick a real life example which the student is familiar with. But if I'm teaching in this school and I don't know what these people are doing after school, I will actually be teaching blindly. And my students may never have the chance to see the relevance of whatever subject I'm teaching.

The kind of curriculum Ngeche describes may not prepare the students effectively for further education and the mastery of academic disciplines which is a priority in the present system. Mastery of academic disciplines is what Eisner refers to as "academic rationalism" (1979, p.57). This orientation, which was once reserved for rulers, has led to a kind of social stratification and provided only a small portion of the total population with the kind of intellectual repertoire that optimally fosters the development of rationality (Eisner, 1979). It should also be clear that the academic rationalism is a tool of cultural alienation and is in total opposition to the child rearing practices as embodied in the philosophy of indigenous education. It fosters competition rather than cooperation which is contradictory to the guiding philosophy of communalism and undermines the philosophy of holisticism by encouraging specialization (Sifuna, 1990).

However, one may be tempted to wonder how a system so entrenched can be changed. The teachers in this study felt that the enormous task of change had to begin with them as teachers, as Murubu points out here:

So essentially we are saying that we should apply honesty on ourselves. And we apply democratic principles in whatever our actions are. You should be ready to be accountable, and if anything, you should be transparent with yourself, everybody should be accountable for their actions... And this begins from the classroom. If the teacher remains a dictator and treats the students as objects, they will never realize that there is any other life. They will actually support dictatorship. Because even us, even in our own live, we are dictators ... somewhere in some activities within our control, we are dictators. Yes we are! ... starting from home.

From Murubu's argument, it is clear that teachers feel that the need to identify their own weaknesses and to seek solutions within themselves would be the first step, as Mukuria also points out:

> In some schools the departments can play a significant role. For instance in a school where one department has two or more teachers, they can discuss some of these problems see what they can do in their schools. Otherwise I don't know if when they do that they will require the presence of the zonal inspectors. They can have the presence of the head of the institution, perhaps he/she will understand such problems and perhaps people can help each other that way.

Wanja too points out this idea of seeking solutions within themselves after identifying their own weaknesses:

> So essentially we are dictators even to our own children. So if we are dictators to our own children or those who are our juniors outside school, we are expected to be dictators even in school. And we cannot get out of it because the person who supervises me is a dictator.

Such statements indicate that teachers have the capability of helping the Kenyan curriculum to break the cycle of irrelevance and inappropriateness. The teachers would be able to identify individual characteristics and behaviors that are valued by the society through active participation in the community, analyzing those characteristics and behavior and developing a curriculum that would develop such individuals. The idea of identifying the desired characteristics and developing curricula to enable students to develop such characteristics concurs with what Schubert (1990) refers to humorously as "magical powers" (p.211). Schubert explains that he usually asks his students to imagine five characteristics that they would like to bestow on everyone in the world. In small groups, they are asked to explain and clarify those characteristics in an attempt to find commonalties such that they can agree on at least one name to a constellation of characteristics. He then asks them to imagine how they might build a curricula designed

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to enable students to develop the characteristics. Students consider how the characteristics might be translated into purposes, learning experiences and organizational patterns, and how the acquisition of those characteristics can be evaluated (Eisner, 1990).

> Questions usually arise about the relative intangible quality of such characteristics as love, creativity, happiness and empathy and whether they can be taught at all. I usually argue that if some human do develop such characteristic, then they must learn them. (p.211)

Developing curricula around desired characteristics is crucial for Kenya, as the teachers in this study realized through discussions and reflections. The child who "succeeds" in schooling is the one who has completely cut links with the way of life of the community and who is consequently well rewarded by the society with a good job away from home. The majority of the individuals produced in school are not adaptable to the political, economic, social changes in the country. They are individuals with a weak cultural identity, individuals who are unable to adjust intelligently to a changing society, people who are devoid of love and respect for their society.

Teachers' Role in the Process of Change

Teachers have extensive and rich knowledge and experience of the practice of teaching (van Manen, 1990). But this knowledge and experience, as the teachers in this study realized, is "constantly threatened by cultural and political forces that tend to impoverish and erode our pedagogical relation to our children" (van Manen, 1990, 155). Teachers therefore have the difficult task of understanding those political and cultural forces that threaten the pedagogical relationship, and interpreting the same in an effort to provide "good pedagogy."

Certain qualities are probably essential to good pedagogy: a sense of vocation, a love or caring for children, a deep sense of responsibility, a thoughtful maturity, a tactful sensitivity towards the child's subjectivity, an interpretive intelligence, a pedagogical understanding of the child's needs, an improvisational resoluteness in dealing with young people, a passion for knowing and learning the mysteries of the world, a moral fiber for standing up for something, a certain worldliness, a sense of active hope in the face of prevailing crises, and not least, a basic dose of humor and vitality. (van Manen, 1990, p. 156)

One may however be tempted to wonder whether it is humanly possible to acquire these skills. Oliner (1995) argues that caring and assuming a personal responsibility, which seems to be the principal ingredients of good pedagogy, are social skills that can be learned. Social skills among other things include effective communication and effective communicators do several things particularly well: they observe carefully, listen actively and make comments which support others.

Careful observers spend a lot of time just watching others. They not only hear what others say, but also observe non-verbal behavior. Concentrated attention can suggest caring remedies even in the absence of verbal cues. (Oliner, 1995, p.80)

From this description, it is clear that the teachers in the study have a difficult task if they are to provide good pedagogy. Their tasks become even more difficult and challenging when they attempt to place the culture of the community at the center so that other things are considered in their relevance and contributions towards the local people understanding themselves (Ngugi, 1986). For these teachers, teaching becomes a personal challenge and responsibility. The challenge is to harness the input from the community pool of knowledge, skills and values and blend it with their own academic knowledge and skills, so that formal schooling produces skilled graduates with values and attitudes necessary for survival in their own communities and out of their communities if need be.

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This challenge can only be overcome by teachers who beside a teaching certificate are conversant with local culture.

The special responsibility is to help the students recover their cultural identity by presenting materials that enable the students to understand the realities of their past and present while maintaining a positive outlook for the future. They should be teachers who have what van Manen refers to as "pedagogical tact":

> While teachers should be willing to take responsibility from the world and the traditions of which they are members, they also need to know how to hand over gradually this world to the young so that they can make it their own world. (van Manen, 1990, p.156)

They are teachers who will be open to the input of other resource people in the community such as elders, people with special skill and careers. The idea of tapping resources from the community concurs with the philosophy of holisticism in indigenous education settings (Sifuna, 1990), where children were expected to gain knowledge from different people within the community. That way, they acquired skills to perform various duties without much room for specialization. Such teachers must be aware that students bring with them values from home developed through the interaction with the environment in and around the home. What the students learn in school can either extend what perceptions students have about themselves or can destroy the image. They should be teachers who are sensitive to the cultural values of the community in which the school is located, people who are familiar with the community child rearing practices which can be adapted to conform with formal schooling.

Teachers Assume Personal Responsibility

We had used the group meetings to share our experiences with the curriculum, to reflect, and to struggle collectively with the meaning of developing a culturally relevant curriculum. Murubu reminded us that it would be a good idea to apply the skills we had acquired in the actual classroom. With each teacher, I discussed a topic which they would introduce to their respective classroom. We had also agreed as a group that each teacher would closely follow the objectives of the curriculum but would try to use the local resources to meet those objectives. That would enable the teachers to cover the syllabus as expected but use materials that are locally available. They were going to plan their lessons using the skills and knowledge we had generated through the readings, conversations, discussions and arguments. The teachers had the responsibility of planning and identifying the resources that are culturally appropriate and use them in the classroom.

Each of the teachers identified a topic that they would implement and monitor as an individual classroom project. In this, I was a dialogic partner, meeting with them periodically throughout. What follows are the topics of each participant, including the two which did not get implemented. I have included these two because of the insights they give in their formulation.

Classroom Project Reports

Formulation, Implementation and Reflection

Even though at the beginning of the project I had agreed with each of the teachers that they would write their experiences in carrying out their projects or we could discuss them as a group or as individuals once they felt they had spent enough time in the project, I have struggled to write this section. This is my dissertation and I have some academic obligations to fulfil. Yet, I do not want to speak *for*, or *instead*, of others in this section where the intent is to describe the individual classroom projects of the teachers. I had made a conscious decision to emphasize the voices of my colleagues, to bring out the voices that are seldom heard instead of putting them in the background and obscuring them with those of established post-colonial writers. It is for this reason that, even though my work and thoughts have been influenced by post-colonial scholars, they are not on the pages. Instead, I have chosen to privilege the voices of those I worked with, the men and women who experience the daily struggles and the painful reality of the classroom situation. I have constructed some of these accounts from audio-recordings of our conversations. The following are the condensed experiences of the five teachers emerging from their classroom projects.

Murubu's Classroom Project

Creative Writing

a) Formulation

Murubu's teaches creative writing to a form two class. For this class, they followed a KIE (Kenya Institute of Education) produced textbook: Integrated English book 2. This book

was segmented into different activities that the teacher was expected to do each week with his/her students. The first part usually would be the oral/spoken English language, dealing with pronunciation, phonetics and so forth. The second section would be a comprehension passage with questions to be answered. The third section would be grammar ranging from the use of verbs, nouns, adjectives and so forth. The final section-- and usually that had the least amount of time-- was writing including composition, letters, minutes, creative writing and so forth.

Murubu felt that this final section was problematic because it did not help the students to develop their creativity through what they encountered in their own environment. Usually, the creative writing activities were not drawn from what the students encountered in their day-to-day activities. The students would therefore mechanically write whatever the book had asked them to do, and the teacher would do the tedious job of marking those pieces.

Murubu was determined to add flavor to the often dull pieces of creative writing. He would take his students to the local market and ask them to sit strategically near people who are holding a conversation without intruding. Listen carefully to the art of conversation as done in their own language. Gikuyu people like many other Kenyan people are very dramatic in the way they narrate their stories. They extensively use body language such as gestures, facial expressions, and their conversation is flavored with special forms of language such as proverbs, dramatic dialogue, rhetoric questions and so forth. Murubu hoped that his students would be able to pick up in minute detail these special forms of creativity and bring them into the classroom. They would analyze in small groups what made the conversations they had listened to interesting. This would

eventually help them as individuals to include those special features to make their own work interesting. This way of encouraging creativity from the local environment would enable the students to make a connection between community knowledge and school knowledge, Murubu hoped.

Unfortunately however, Murubu left teaching in second term when this activity was supposed to be implemented.

Wanja's Classroom Project

Advertising

a) **Formulation**

Wanja teaches commerce and business economics. Even though she tells her form two students that commerce is a subject they live with everywhere, they don't seem to get it. This is because they are taught from textbooks which make little or no connection with the students' day-to-day activities. Her next topic was to be advertising. Normally, this topic would be presented from a perspective that does not show how the students are affected by advertising in their daily life. They would copy notes from a textbook and Wanja would evaluate them by mid-term and end-term exams. After participating in this project, Wanja was going to take a new approach. At the nearest shopping center are large posters and paintings on the shops, which are meant to advertise certain products. Wanja would take the students to the shopping center, which is about a hundred yards from the school, and they would analyze these advertisements. This way of learning would bring the advertising topic closer to them. She would then ask the students to bring in an advertisement from the radio. This would enable the students see the connection

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between what they have at home and in their environment as an extension of the classroom.

Again, this project did not take off. Wanja was unwell for a good part of second term, which made it difficult for her to plan for the trip. She also had to catch up with much of what she had lost of the syllabus and her students would be quite anxious.

Ngeche's Classroom Project

Environmental Studies and Human Health

a) **Formulation**

Ngeche knew that his next topic with the form three class in biology would be environmental studies and human health. According to the syllabus, he would teach from a textbook, ask the students to make notes or he would dictate notes to them. He would teach about waste disposal, food hygiene, and diseases: causes and control. He would then evaluate the information he had given to them through mid-term and end of term examinations. After participating in this project, he decided he wanted to make a difference in his teaching practices. He would teach the same information, but he would incorporate a practical approach to his teaching methods as well as build the knowledge from student's experiences.

b) **Implementation**

The following is a Ngeche's breakdown of his five weeks of teaching:

14/5/97
Lesson 1 8.10-8.50 a.m.
Objective:
1. Definition of refuse.

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2. Identification of types of refuse in:
    a) schools;
    b) homes.
3. Reasons for refuse disposal and why it is not adequately done (lack of technical know how, failure to identify resources available, lack of respect for the "home grown")

Discussion:
1. People always produce refuse wherever they live or work.
2. Common refuse in schools and in homes include paper, waste food and water, clothes, shoes, old/broken utensils, human excreta.

Conclusion:
1. The refuse could easily be disposed off cheaply with little creativity and imagination, plus knowledge of the importance of proper disposal to avoid diseases and pollution which generally makes life uncomfortable.
2. Disposal of waste paper in school:
    a) Method – waste paper baskets
    b) Materials
        i)   sticks e.g. wattle, cypress, mugio, mukigi
        ii)   strings e.g. wattle, banana, mugio

Practical activity

Students to make waste paper baskets using materials above collected locally for use in school. Each student would make the basket at school or at home. The project should be completed in two days and submitted to the teacher for evaluation.

21/5/97

Lesson 2

Objective
    1. Disposal of refuse in:
        a) rural areas
        b) urban centers
        c) institutions

Development
1. Methods of refuse disposal:
        i)   compost pits
        ii)   incinerators
        iii) controlled tipping

Students identified methods applied in specific circumstances and why.

Practical work
1. Making of a simple incinerator using discarded materials in the school.
        a) old water drums
        b) old metal bars
        c) digging of compost pits and burning refuse in the school compound.

Application

Students were able to apply knowledge learnt in their homes to their school works.

Students identified better ways of disposing refuse such as feeding some leftovers to domestic animals, peelings etc. The biodegradable refuse to be put in the farms as manure while the those that are not bio-degradable can be burned in the incinerators they had made.

23/5/97
Lesson 3
Objective:
1. Refuse disposal in schools and homes
2. 2. Feces and urine disposal in rural and urban areas.
Discussion
1. Simple methods can be used to dispose refuse in schools, homes and institutions:
    a) incinerators from old water drums
2. pit latrine: the common method used to dispose feces and urine in rural areas
    a) basic requirements
    b) advantages
3. Other methods
    a) flush toilets
    b) bucket latrines
       i) advantages
       ii) disadvantages
Students' projects (group work)
a) construction of simple incinerators from old water drums
b) use of local plants to keep off flies from pit-latrines.

26/5/97
Mid-review of the project
Class interview
a) The students indicated that they have seen more sense in learning biological sciences.
b) They also feel they are being made to feel responsible while being given projects to carry out in school.
c) They expressed interest in carrying out projects with minimum supervision.
Teacher opinion
a) increased student participation in class
b) students have shown more interest in the subject:
       i) borrowed reserved reference books which they had previously rejected
       ii) asked questions indicating deeper comprehension of biological principles

NB/ teacher felt that the time allocated for covering the topic is too short to give room for applied activities.

6/6/97
Lesson 4
Objective:
1. Definition of ecological terms
2. Application of basic ecological principles in daily farming activities

Discussion
Definition of ecological principles: ecology, environment, habitat, ecosystem, biomass, and carrying capacity.
Applications:
A simple farming ecosystem (shamba)
Components

Biotic	Abiotic
Farm	soil
Animal	Mineral
Human beings	Manure
Plants	Water

Conclusion
1. All components of the ecosystem (shamba) must be preserved through
   a) soil conservation – no soil erosion
   b) application of manure to maintain soil fertility, therefore, plants and animal health.
   c) Water catchment areas should be preserved
2. Degradation of any component of the ecosystem leads to breakdown of the ecosystem, which leads to poor yields.
3. Good farming practices should be carried out in order to preserve the ecosystem
Important terms:
   a) environment preservation
   b) soil-water conservation
Project
1) Determination of the area of the school napier grass shamba;
2) Determination of the biomass of the napier grass in school;
3) Estimation of the number of cows that can be maintained by the napier grass in school

NB/ Students encouraged to carry out similar estimates in their homes.

Ngeche's implementation process generated a lot of important information, particularly the emphasis it puts on using locally available resources that are also

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culturally relevant. The project showed clearly that using locally available resources to

enrich curriculum is not just possible, but it also brings out the best in the students as is

indicated by the discussion which follows.

c) Discussion and personal reflection

In Ngeche's case, I have allowed him to narrate his own experiences. This is

because he wrote parts of it as journal entry and dissecting it with my own interpretation

feels brutal on my part. Secondly, my intent is to allow the reader to savor the speaking

with rather than *for*, to encourage the reader to hear the voice, and listen for the echoes

and resonance. I realize this is ultimately artificial, to use Smith's (1996) argument that

the "tone, the inflections, the pauses, the tensions are missing" (p.80). However, it is my

attempt to be sensitive to the "authority" that I have as the narrator and my responsibility

to those who agreed to be my research partners. The following is Ngeche's story as he

narrated it:

> We had a classroom project which was to assess how much the
> students know from their daily experiences, how well they understand
> topics, and from there to make them sensitive to the biological principles
> being applied in those experiences. From there we began looking into
> ways and means of making them apply that knowledge in a more refined
> biological manner. So it's a matter of building up on what the student
> already know and clarifying misconceptions, which may be there as well
> as removing, some misplaced ideas.

> For instance a student brought up in this area may believe that a
> specific activity is wrong depending on the culture and I as the teacher
> will explain the biological principle behind it enabling the students to
> challenge some of their beliefs or knowledge sources. This leaves the
> student more open by applying biological concepts to what they already
> know. For instance students in my class knew that mosquitoes cause
> malaria but they did not know that mosquitoes do not cause but only
> transmit the disease from one sick person to another. As a result they did
> not know that removing its habitat areas such as water pools, discarded

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empty containers and so forth so that the mosquitoes do not come into contact with a sick person could actually prevent malaria.

Another example is on some cultural inhibitions. We were talking about human health and nutrition and we were analyzing the kind of foods they eat, sources of carbohydrates, vitamins and proteins and we came to the conclusion that some families can spend up to six months without eating meat since proteins especially of animal origin are some of the most expensive foods. We then had a discussion on alternative and cheaper sources of proteins and I suggested that they can eat rabbits and almost everyone was against because culturally, rabbits are animals reared and eaten by uncircumcised boys. And I was explaining to them that incidentally, rabbits have a much higher level of proteins than say beef. They are also cheaper to keep and manage since they consume very little food. They also reproduce fast. And they have understood rabbit keeping is a viable project they can undertake at home.

Much of what I gathered from student was through brainstorming sessions rather than the routine question and answer format. This was something we discussed with them and it was a very interesting discussion. I was quite comfortable with it, for one, I realized I was using less time and effort to communicate to a student whatever material I wanted them to grasp. However preparation, took longer time because I had to look for and read materials which were not in the textbook such as magazines and newspaper cuttings and that was taking quite some time. For instance this project they did on making an incinerator, I did very little supervision, all I did was to tell them that one can make an incinerator using an old drum and I explained how it can be done and then told them to make. Actually I didn't expect them to produce what they did. They didn't require reading elsewhere. But I read a handbook produced by AMREF on how to make facilities available for maintaining high standards of hygiene in a school. I presented this idea to students and after that they went to work on their own. They formed groups and then chose group leaders for each group. All I had to evaluate was how well the incinerators they made worked. They saw that it was a more efficient way of burning rubbish because it is well ventilated from the bottom. In some cases the teacher may find that he has very little involvement in students' activities except maybe supervision and being around for students to ask questions or make clarifications.

Initially students who are accustomed to streamlined teaching could not understand but I think that later on they realized that learning is much more interesting and they enjoyed the freedom to express themselves in class and this raised their morale. We had a problem of students refusing textbooks such as of Physics, Chemistry and Biology and the books had to be taken back to the store. After two weeks of

instituting this teaching method, students started coming for these books because I started referring them to those books to read ahead of the next lesson. This helped them participate in class as well as air their views based on what they had read. Students participated more actively in class and showed more readiness to answer question. It is surprising that those students we regard, as poor academically in application are often much better and appear to be more keen in their practical work than those who are much better academically. I realized that we sometimes fail to give them a chance to express themselves in those areas they excel in. It helped improve the performance of these poor students e.g. Tagambia, Tikoho and Gece (pseudonyms) were actually leading in applied work. I think they must have noticed there was a difference in teaching methods, which was later reflected in their assessment grades. In this project, the mean mark was higher than that achieved using the conventional teaching methods. We had a mean of 73.65% while that of another topic taught conventionally was 62% and for last term the mean mark was 58%. So there is a big improvement. Then the standard deviation for the project was 15.37 and for the other topics taught this term it was 17.24. For last term it was 16.92.So from the mean we can see that the students definitely scored higher and the std. deviation for the project was lower which shows that the differences in performance for the project was lower, the poor students performed better. This kind of teaching helped raise performance and I think it's because it gave everyone a chance to participate. It was interesting because I also got to learn from them, some things I did not know and I had to send them to find some things from the local knowledgeable people. For instance I learnt from them that if you burn mubangi (a local plant) it keeps off flies. I realized the biggest mistake we make as teachers is to make the students think the teacher knows everything. The biggest problem with this kind of teaching is that it is not recognized by the education system and the examination body when setting the exam and the students are expected to study things which are alien to them and are only examined on them so they only concentrate on that. And these are things they have never encountered.

For instance we were studying the concept of an ecosystem in ecology (the association between the living and non-living things in a place) and the examination body expects the teacher to teach things like the ecosystem in a national park and most students have never been there. The textbook gives such examples as experiments done in America. For them to understand, I gave them the example of the shamba (peasant farm) and its ecosystem, farm animals, micro-organisms, humus, manure, plants etc. and the inter-relationship between the living and non-living things in the shamba. The textbook gives such examples as a lake ecosystem, things, which have little if any application to our students. Things they have little choice but to memorize. Whereas with the example of the ecosystem of a shamba the students can understand the need to maintain

the ecosystem and the need for organic farming, reducing the amount of fertilizers used in the farm.

The kind of system we have enslaves the mind, prevents the students from thinking and expressing themselves freely and then ties up the students to certain activities and makes them blind on how to apply the knowledge gathered from school at home. If the curriculum setters were well informed they would actually prepare a curriculum based on regions with an emphasis on the local environment and then move on to teach about other regions later on. I think it would work so long as teachers were guided along. The only problem is that teachers would probably not like it because it would be too much work. But my experience during this project has shown me that it would only be taxing at the beginning. Just like a new teacher before you get used to the routine. It would also solve the problem of textbooks to a certain extent. Currently the Kenya Institute of Education is the only body that recommends textbooks to be used in schools. But with this kind of curriculum, it would be up to the teacher to know what books would be relevant for his/her subject and it would go further to encourage Kenyan writers to produce more accurate and quality books. Currently the syllabus we have can only be found in textbooks by the KIE and the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation and this was a deliberate effort to make these books marketable even though they often have irrelevant topics and leave out other important topics.

The way Ngeche narrates his experiences shows clearly that he had acquired skills and new knowledge in the process of this project. He had taken another approach to teaching whereby he allowed the knowledge students brought from home to be valued in the classroom. By so doing, he brought out the best in his students by allowing them to have a space in the classroom to bring out what they know. He also allowed the students to treat him as a learner. Ngeche's experiences confirms that there is something of inherent value in allowing students to know themselves and their own environment first.

Mukuria's Classroom Project:

<u>Mashairi</u>

a) **Formulation**

Mukuria has always taught and liked Mashairi (Kiswahili poetry). In fact, he has in the past encouraged his form three students to write Mashairi that would later be presented and win in Annual Secondary School Music Festivals. Mukuria's students had tried to explain some of the things they see around through Mashairi, for instance, the problems that young people face in the rural areas, such as drug addiction starting as early as in primary schools. From the time students start taking drugs in primary school, they continue doing the same in secondary school and by the time they get to form four, they are not in a position to prepare themselves for the final exam:

> I had guided them by telling the things I wanted them to do. Things which would help them in school. Things that are in their locality.

However, telling the students what to do did not yield the results that Mukuria had expected:

> But most of them could not do anything because as I told you, they just wrote Mashairi's from textbook, others from the newspapers and just forwarded them to me. I would say that students are somehow lazy because we had discussed these things, I thought that they would follow the instruction and I thought they would come up with things that would help them do well in their exams or even do well in school.

However, he also gets frustrated by the kind of Mashairi that is prescribed by the Ministry of Education, which often is written by outsiders. Even though such kind of Mashairi may raise important issues in the society in general, they do not relate in an immediate way to the needs of these students. Even though teachers are allowed some freedom to teach Mashairi, the examination demands makes him drill the students into

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answering exam questions. Thus, instead of making Mashairi a subject of enjoyment and appreciation of aesthetic beauty, the students often find it a difficult subject and fail to appreciate the beauty of words as well as the issues raised. After participating in this project, Mukuria decided to take a different approach in teaching Mashairi.

b) **Implementation**

The following is Mukuria's project as presented to the form three class:

1. Identify problems affecting the youth in rural areas such as:
   a. Drug addiction
   b. Teenage pregnancy
   c. Unemployment
2. Gather information from the community why this is happening and what people are saying and doing about it. This information can be obtained from local music, from church , discussions to understand diversity of opinions, stories, proverbs, advice from parents and teachers and other community activities.
3. Present these issues through a Shairi (poem).
4. Bring the Shairi to classroom for use.

According to Mukuria this project would continue. He hoped that some of the Mashairi brought would be entered for the Annual Secondary School Music Festival which is an event they had previously participated in.

c) **Discussion and Personal Reflection**

Mukuria chose not to write in his journal but instead to have a conversation with me when he was ready to. Being a dialogic partner meant that I shared some openness with him through the interpretations of what was going on in his individual classroom project. I also felt invited to interrupt his story to provide further information, to elaborate on thoughts from my own reflections and to highlight some of the themes that were

emerging from his work. The following is a discussion I held with Mukuria at his own invitation.

Mukuria revealed to me during our conversation that he experienced some difficulties in implementing his classroom project as he points out:

> Students are not used to taking control of their own learning or even to take some initiative. It was the first time for them to engage in such a project, and they are not used. And some of them did not take it seriously and they did not understand the importance of such a project even if I had tried to put it straight to them why we were doing that.

However, Mukuria realized what can be done to overcome such difficulties:

> One needs to be close to them, and to guide them even when they return home to the rural areas. If one can have time to go visit them especially in their free time when they are not in school, they are doing their own things, go and visit them and see for yourself what they are doing and try to discuss with them.

Getting involved with students even outside school would also be of much help to the teacher:

> It would also help if teachers became active participants in the community activities. The teacher would be able to get first hand experience, which he can then use, in the classroom. If teachers go to the community, they can gather useful knowledge to use in the class.

Mukuria admitted that despite the initial difficulties he has encountered in this project, "I can say it has really encouraged me to see things maybe in more different situations."

> For instance the idea of having to go to the field to get information and gather materials that you can bring to the students in classroom is very important. But right now you see, we bring only what we have in school and not considering what students have in their own locality.

Sharing the knowledge students bring from home, Mukuria argues, is relevant because when these students complete their form 4, they return to their communities and start involving themselves with various activities in their community.

And if they understand their community, if there are things that can be used which students did in school, or if the students feel that there are things that can be done in better ways, based on the knowledge they obtained from school, then the students can be able to help the community. The students would be able to communicate their knowledge as they interact with the rest of the members of their community.

However, Mukuria find it challenging to develop a curriculum that can be acceptable to

all communities:

> Before you start writing a curriculum relevant to the local environment, there are some things you need to put into consideration. You have to be aware that in an area like this one, there are some things that you might say can be included in the curriculum, but in another curriculum, that may not be acceptable. It is therefore important to understand all the communities so that if there is something you have come up with, you try to discuss it with people from other communities so that what you want included in the curriculum can be accepted and can be used anywhere in the country because you are not writing the curriculum for just one area.

Challenging as it may be though, Mukuria thinks its advantages cannot be underscored:

> It would bring the students closer to the reality because the way things are now, you find that the students are so much dependent on the teacher, and I the teacher in most cases has to introduce the students to various issues, and the students are not given time to think for themselves. This way, the students will become more motivated to learn if the teacher is not involving her/himself so much. And then giving them time to discover things on their own.

Taking this approach to teaching would not only be helpful to the students but to the

teachers as well, as Mukuria argues:

> I think it can be able to help our students so much because it will bring that cooperation between the students and the teachers, and not the students to fear the teachers, and the teachers to give the students freedom to explore things, to ask questions, students to ask other students questions and also teachers to ask questions from their students and the teachers will be able to learn from their students and likewise, the students will learn from their teachers without any fear. The teacher will be a learner as well.

Mwingi's Classroom Project:

<u>Market Gardening</u>

a) **Formulation**

Mwingi teaches geography. Much of the geography he teaches comes from textbooks. Some of the information he passes on to his students cannot help them to survive in their own environment even though it might help them pass the exam. Mwingi believes that the area in which this school is located is agriculturally productive and so a lot of time should be used helping the students in understanding the soil, seasons, suitable crops, pest and disease control etc. This would enable the students after they leave school to become economically productive people in the community. However, a lot of time is spent feeding the students with book knowledge.

After participating in this project, Mwingi decided to take another approach to teaching. He would begin by taking the students to the local open food market. The students would be able to look at the products that are being sold, how much those products cost, how readily available they are and where they are obtained. Back in the classroom, the students would analyze their findings and apply that knowledge to what they see in the community.

b) **Implementation**

The following is Mwingi's project as presented to the students:

    Preparation
    1. Methods: How to carry out investigative research.
    2. Procedure: Steps to be followed
        a. Develop a hypothesis
        b. Develop objectives
    3. Actual research

        a. Develop questionnaire/ interview questions
        b. Collecting data
        c. Analyzing data
        d. Compiling data
        e. Assessment

4. Application
5. Problems encountered.

Preliminary study

Mwingi's own visit to the market revealed the following:

Expensive and not readily available:

        a. Millet, sorghum, arrowroots, bananas, cassava, yams, sweet potatoes, cow peas
        b. Carrots, tomatoes, spinach, kale, cabbages

Expensive and available:

        a. Beans

Not expensive and readily available

        a. Maize

Cheap and in abundance:

        a. Mangoes

NB/ Mwingi visited the market in the month February (the driest month of the year in this area).

The project is ongoing.

c) Discussion and Personal Reflection

Mwingi too chose not to write in his journals but instead to have a conversation with me when he was ready to. Again, being a dialogic partner meant that I shared some openness with him through the interpretations of what was going on in his individual classroom project. I also felt invited to interrupt his story to provide further information, to elaborate on thoughts from my own reflections and to highlight some of the themes that were emerging from his work. Even though his project on market gardening was still on going by the time I left, he agreed that there is a need to change the teaching approach if they are to meet the needs of the students. While they as teachers keep referring to their students as "future leaders," they do not equip them with skills that will enable them to

assume responsibility for their own community. The following are some of the thoughts I

shared with him when he invited me to talk with him:

Right from the onset, Mwingi felt the need to change the teaching approach and

particularly to treat the students as 'knowers' of their own world as he point out:

> There is a need to have change in this area [teaching approach]. The way it
> taken that students are the future leaders, they should tackle some
> problems in their community. But for them to do this, they need some
> critical awareness. There is a need for leaders to identify priorities in terms
> of economic development.

One of the ways this critical awareness can be raised in students is by providing

them with relevant curriculum, Mwingi argues. "For us to develop, we need to assess

what we have, and then provide the necessary knowledge through an appropriate

curriculum." An appropriate curriculum according to Mwingi would be one in which

certain skills would be developed right from early stages of education, so that the person

is informed from their home place and local environment before getting broad

information, relating to the area of specialization, such that the knowledge and skills a

person has will address the need of the local environment. As Mwingi points out,

> the problem with the current curriculum is that even though you might
> help a person to pass the exam in a particular subject, if you are to go deep
> in to that subject, the person may not be having enough knowledge or
> skills resulting from such information. The kind of assessment we have is
> on theoretical knowledge but as far as application is concerned, you would
> find a lot of limitations. The curriculum is content-oriented with no skills.

Mwingi sees the problem of lack of skills as coming from the over-reliance

teachers and students have on the textbooks. These textbooks that are in most cases

produced for the whole country may not address the needs of specific areas:

> The textbooks we have are controlled by the syllabus. It is a resource in
> which a person might say "if you are eating rice you need a spoon." So if
> you buy rice, somebody else will start making a spoon to sell to you. In

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the same way, the textbooks try to follow the syllabus. The textbooks follow a certain order, such that when the teachers sees such a book, they think it is a good book because it is where the exam is taken from. You buy the book because it will help the students pass. You will make the student aware that such a book was written in relation to a particular place.

Taking the approach he took for his class during this project, Mwingi sees there will be little need for the textbook. This is because the knowledge that students will get may not be found in any textbook because it is very situation specific. For instance, when he was doing the preliminary preparation for the fieldwork, he brainstormed with the students about the problems they are likely to encounter during a visit to the local market. And lifting from the textbook, the students said they would have language problems (ridiculous and irrelevant because the majority of people in the market are Gikuyu, which is also their language). They also suggested they would have transport problems (again this is ridiculous because the market is located within a walking distance). It would also be too hot (this again is ridiculous because the issue of being hot cannot arise for people who are accustomed to live in that environment and have adapted to it).

So they are putting a problem that may have been written down in a textbook, and which may be encountered by other people doing fieldwork in other areas. In a local place, you are not likely to have such problems. Ask the students to elaborate and they don't know, because they did not approach the problem from a situational point of view. "I'm handling this because it is close to me, not because I read it from a book. It is something I can see, I can see the problem where it is, I can experience, I know it is there.

Despite the problem of competing with textbooks, Mwingi sees the importance of beginning from the local environment as being very important. This is because when you give the students "local examples, they rarely forget what you taught them. The students can feel it in the mind." Even for the teacher, using this approach is important because

it is kind of posing a challenge and at the same time provoking the mind on some of the approaches we have and how limited some of them are. Broadening the essence of addressing whatever is taught to the day-to-day situation, in everyday life.

Mwingi also sees the possibility of creating employment within the local community if students develop skills that are relevant to their local environment and use local resources.

> I remember there is a time I was telling the students, I don't believe somebody should fail to get employment or to say that there is no source of income. Everybody can have something to do and get income from it. You can use what is available in your environment to employ yourself and create employment in the community. It is not a must that a person has a lot of money to start with. What is required is commitment. So I had told my students that even if I would stop teaching, I would start a small business. The students are endless resources if they are allowed the freedom to express themselves or are stimulated to think.

Mwingi views the present way of teaching that encourages the students to cram for the exam as doing a lot of disservice to the students. This he argues is because

> even after they cram they still fail. Because what was put in their mind was not relevant to their life, or it was too limited in as far as their local environment is concerned. When you put what is national into their local environment, it becomes very hard for them.

The other problem Mwingi sees in the present approach is a system that labels people as failures because they did not pass the national exam. The kind of approach he proposed to use for this project would enable

> those who are seen as failures to cope, or to realize that they are not failures in life, all they have failed is the exam. They can still succeed in other ways, using their local environment and the available resources.

As Mwingi summarized his views very well when he said:

> Developing a curriculum that has local relevance would be creating more channels. I believe that if people are provided with knowledge and skills that can be utilized, in the end it would help such people who are usually labeled as "failures."

<u>In Retrospect</u>

Fullan (1993) argues that teachers cannot afford to wait for the system to change itself, they must play an active role in educational change. The work of the teachers that I have described in this chapter provides an example of what teachers are capable of doing in effecting curriculum change. In chapter 1, I pointed out that once the rationale for change was established, the teachers explored the question of how much change could be accommodated within the curriculum boundaries so that curriculum goals could be met. Reflecting back, I can say that the changes they attempted could be accommodated within the present curriculum boundaries because they all followed the topics that had been prescribed by the curriculum guidelines. What changed though was the teaching approach and particularly the teaching materials.

After the teachers participated in this project, each of them agreed that what and how they taught was problematic. They had seen the rationale of my advocacy, which we had worked through as a group and they were ready to implement it. As is clear from the formulation of each of the classroom projects, the teachers had begun to approach teaching from a critical perspective, with the aim of bringing out the students' creativity and potential, as well as challenging their own intellect. What is important though is that the teachers were able to access local resources to aid their teaching. The fact that teachers moved beyond introducing a new topic to devising new strategies of presenting it concurs with my earlier commitment of *sharing skills* with my research partners so that the *process* continues after I had left. Looking at how each teacher formulated their classroom project is a clear indication that the way I had done my research had brought

my research partners into the process of knowledge generation, grounded in the

epistemological position that places the importance on:

a) experiential knowing that emerges through participation with others;

b) beliefs that people can learn to be self-reflexive about their world and their

actions within it (Reason, 1994).

Ultimately, what the teachers did in the classroom and how they reported what

they had found out is an important part of the process in this research. The teachers had

become more observant and ready to experiment with the sole intent of watching the

changes that might or might not occur on the students. Implementing what they had

formulated was both a challenge for the teacher and a stimulant for the students. Even the

students' performance in the classroom had began to show remarkable changes, enough

to help the teachers consider that this way of teaching is better for the student. Listen to

Ngeche's observation after implementing his classroom project:

> Students participated more actively in class and showed more readiness to
> answer question. It is surprising that those students we regard, as poor
> academically in application are often much better and appear to be more
> keen in their practical work than those who are much better academically.
> I realized that we sometimes fail to give them a chance to express
> themselves in those areas they excel in.

Without falling into the danger of making conclusive statements about my

research process, there are important issues that have emerged through the

implementation of participatory action research. By making a commitment of doing

research '*with*' instead of '*on*' or '*for*' others and by seeking collaboration with the

community of teachers, in which I am a member, we have gained important skills and

knowledge that enables us to challenge the structures of domination. This way of doing

research has helped us to move beyond understanding what we do (i.e. providing data) to

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theorizing about what we know (i.e. creating meaning) and to transform our reality for

social change (i.e. taking action). This way of doing research creates new possibilities of

studying curriculum problems.

CHAPTER 6

SO, WHAT NEXT?

Throughout this thesis, I have been groping my way toward understanding the ways participatory action research may be useful in effecting curriculum change. This study is about openness to questions, openness to wonder, an openness to the possibilities, often missed out in systematic inquiry, to use Smith's (1996) words, with the specific goal of exploring the possibilities of tapping the local resources to enrich school curriculum in Kenya. This would enable the teachers to use both material and human resources which are locally available to meet curriculum needs. This study has been spawned by the notion of "moving the center" (Ngugi, 1993) to create many centers that reflect the diversity of world peoples and cultures. This notion has encouraged an openness to talk about the importance of knowing oneself and one's own environment as the correct basis of absorbing the world; "that there could never be one center from which to view the world but that different people in the world had their culture and environment as the center" (p.9). It was also spawned by the notion of "creating a center at the margin" (hooks, 1990) which is described as a space of "radical openness" (p.149). A place that nourishes one's capacity to resist. It offers one the "possibility of a radical perspective from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (hooks, 1990, p.150). These two notions reinforced my belief that research can be conceptualized in such a way as to allow participants to engage in authentic dialogue as conversational inquiry and in doing so make a difference in the way curriculum is enacted in schools. Ideologically, it was founded in the belief that knowing oneself and one's environment as the center of education is a morally defensible ideological change. It has been an exercise of drawing

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the experience of knowing, privileging the voice of participants and sharing of skills to ensure continuity.

Throughout the project, I have drawn from a variety of scholarly works and from the dialogues as conversational inquiry that took place over a period of eight months with five teachers, individually and in group meetings, to illuminate the multiple dimensions of participatory action research as a method of enacting curriculum change. Participatory action research encourages researchers to collaborate with people in the research context on the interpretation of the data. Kushner and Norris (1980) argue that the task of understanding can only be successfully pursued when provisions are made for people to "move from merely articulating what they know (i.e., providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e., creating meaning)" (p.27). It was therefore necessary that the final part of the research process was an engagement with data analysis, where the teachers gave meaning to their experiences through discussion, creating discourses and personal reflections. This part of the research process is important because the perspectives of the teachers can only be effective if they are not forced into preconceived "academic methodologies of categorizing knowledge" (St. Denis, 1989, p.38). As Hall argues, despite the best intentions in the world, researchers cannot comprehend, much less intuitively grasp, the conditions and priorities of survival and growth in the villages -- by virtue of the fact that "our class positions and our class interests, the knowledge we created about their lives was [is] bound to be in error" (1979, p.398). Teachers interpreting the data from their perspective was an important part of the project. It meant that they gained access to "scientific" methods of generating data about

their world "so that they can make the necessary changes in their world as they see it" (St. Denis, 1979, p.41).

Production of knowledge in this research includes a multiplicity of voices. Even though writing is a solitary activity, "and one voice easily comes to dominate in the final form a paper takes" (Peterat & Smith, 1996, p.17), I have as much as possible allowed the participants to talk for themselves. What has emerged then is a text that is less predictable and less controlling, a text in which the reader will make "connections between the images, events and settings that are presented" (Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 1993, p.390). This kind of text allows the reader to "synthesize the possibilities offered by the text with elements of his or her own experiences … to recapture them in ways that may be more evocative and more true to the experience as lived" (Peterat & Smith, 1996, p.17).

Producing a participatory action research text has been a "site of struggle" in terms of presenting a text that "mixes genres and styles" (Maclure, 1995, p.109) and maintains some balance of meeting academic demands. Considering that the community from which this research was done is more oral than literate, it is only fair that the text retain as much as possible the original/authentic voice of participants. This has meant using writing techniques that imitate the spoken word of the community. Special forms of language such as metaphors, poems and songs have been used in the text so as to capture the imagination of the reader, at the same time engaging them to actively fill in the 'gaps' in the text. This kind of text may be what Sumara and Luce-Kapler refers to as "writerly text" (p.390), a text which more space for the reader, has more accurate representations of life itself, and is open, more ambiguous, and more unpredictable (1993).

By nurturing a participatory co-researching relationship with teachers and allowing them active participation in knowledge production, there is an obvious acquisition of new knowledge and skills. A co-researching relationship destabilizes the binary opposition of researcher/researched and challenges the closure of meaning and possibility that they inevitably bring about. This kind of research "demystifies the very act of obtaining knowledge which in the past has accentuated and perpetuated the powerlessness of certain groups" (Reinharz, 1992, p.1991). This study therefore provides some new possibilities of doing research for curriculum and social change.

I believe that participatory action research was the appropriate methodology for my research context. Since it is concerned with the shift of power balance between the researcher and researched, it encourages dialogical relationships and provides a voice and feeling to disenfranchised peoples, and is committed to social transformation through action and reflection. It provided me with an opportunity of generating knowledge with mutual understanding. This way of doing research validated the teachers' knowledge and empowered them to seek changes.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Participatory action research is a site of struggle. Although academics that are not participatory action researchers experience moral dilemmas as they conduct research with living persons, some of my experiences were almost paralyzing. To use St. Denis' (1989) words, in reference to community-based participatory research, this kind of research is 'messier' than 'conventional' research because it does not follow a standard research formula. Instead, it is dependent on the interpersonal dynamics of all the research

participants. Dependence on interpersonal dynamics makes it difficult to pre-determine

transpiring events which may influence the outcome of the research. For example, two of

my research partners were unable to implement their classroom projects even though they

had actively participated in articulating what they know (i.e. providing data) and

theorizing what they know (i.e. creating meaning). They were unable to participate fully

in transforming the reality for social change (i.e. taking action). These unforeseen human

dynamics reminded me about the inevitability of working with human beings who often

have diverse needs and aspirations. One of the teachers left teaching for another career

and the other one had health problems that caused her to be constantly away from the

school. Such experiences enabled me to understand that participation cannot be taken for

granted. For a variety of reasons, people may be unwilling or unable to participate.

Secondly, the researcher in participatory action research has little control over the

research once the collaborative partners come on board. Even though participatory action

research derives its strength in sharing power and control with the collaborating partners,

sometimes I felt that I was being taken where I didn't want to go. As I mentioned earlier

in Chapter 1, I set out to face the challenging task of exploring the possibilities of tapping

the local resources to enrich school curriculum in Kenya, so that teachers begin to use

both material and human resources which are locally available to meet curriculum goals.

By using the local resources, the learners will begin to view the local knowledge,

wisdom, values, beliefs and skills as being important to the understanding of the school

knowledge which will help them develop a strong cultural identity.

Unfortunately however, this is not where my research partners wanted to go.

Instead, they wanted to follow the curriculum guidelines particularly because of the time

factor, but change the teaching approach and use locally available materials which are not

necessarily culturally relevant. In other words, the teachers did not want to restrict

themselves solely to the cultural materials because as Mukuria cautioned:

> There are some things that you might say can be included in the
> curriculum, but in another curriculum, that may not be acceptable. It is
> therefore important to understand all the communities so that if there is
> something you have come up with, you try to discuss it with people from
> other communities so that what you want included in the curriculum can
> be accepted and can be used anywhere in the country because you are not
> writing the curriculum for just one area.

This caution reminded me that for participatory action research to thrive, I had to give up

some of my power and control originating from philosophical understandings and

assumptions. I had to constantly re-examine my assumed control of the research and

constantly negotiate power and control with the research partners.

Such experiences enabled me to understand the 'risk' the researcher has to be

willing to take in using participatory action research. Participatory action research should

not be seen as an efficient way of doing research. Assumptions and ideological

perspectives accumulated over a long period of time are painful to give up. It can only

occur when enough time is set aside for researcher and partners to know each other well,

to allow opinions, some in conflict with each other, to be heard. This way, the researcher

is able to give up something in exchange of something else more useful and practical

under the circumstances. In short, the researcher in participatory action research has to be

flexible.

This study has other limitations as well. It centers on the work of teachers and,

thus, is a limited picture since curriculum change involves more than what just the

teachers do. The impact of curriculum change on administrators, parents, community

members and policy makers is not central to this research. By asking for volunteer participants, there is the ever-present possibility of attracting like-minded peoples, thus failing to address the diverse perspectives of day-to-day contradictions.

Further, by focussing on using locally available material and human resources, the study may have limited value for teachers in levels that are bound by external examinations and curriculum directives. Nevertheless, I believe the study is critical for beginning the process of change.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Too much research is perceived by teachers as criticism that exhorts them to change but does not provide them with a realistic means to do so (Smith, 1996). Although some suggestions are often made, they are in most cases speculative and not attempted in practice. Such documents often have the effect of discouraging teachers rather than inspiring them. In this study, I provided the teachers with a realistic means to articulate what they know (providing data) and to theorize about what they know (creating meaning). This way of doing research demonstrates that teachers have an important role in making not only curriculum decisions but also changing the education system. They can make a difference in their own classroom, the school and the community if their views are treated with respect.

Thus, in this research, I do not intend to prescribe answers to profound curriculum problems, because my obligation is not a project to be completed as much as the process is to be ongoing. However, there are some significant implications from the study.

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Closing the Ever Present 'Gap' in Research

I literally agonized trying to come up with a research methodology that could adequately describe my experiences as an academic researcher going back to the community where I was born and raised. Much of the agony stems from the realization that the existing research methodologies and the subsequent terminology has until recently excluded the experiences of third world academics with "insider" knowledge (Ahlberg, 1991; Ndunda, 1995). Indeed, Wright (1984) points out that "African thinkers who espouse ideas that appear strange to the West are viewed as primitive, childlike, or inconsequential" (cited in Tedla, 1995, p. 13).

> This insistence that Western culture is superior to all other cultures has effectively barred out from consideration other ways of interpreting and understanding our world. (Tedla, 1995. P.13)

Tedla's idea concurs with Fine's (1994) argument that much of qualitative research has reproduced, "if contradiction-filled, a colonizing discourse of the 'other' by re-inventing the hyphen of self-other that both separate and merges personal identities" (p.70). Fine argues further that this "re-invention of the 'other' has made critical, feminist and/or third world scholars view social science as a tool of domination" (1994, p.70). Fine's argument resonates with that of Alcoff (1991) who points out that speaking for the "other" has come under increasing criticism and in some communities it is being rejected as "arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate" (p.6).

I have also come to learn that knowledge produced by social science is a powerful and effective means to influence decisions regarding people's everyday lives. Whether this knowledge is used for the advantage or disadvantage of the group of people being researched "depends on who controls the research process" (St Denis, 1979, p.1).

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Although there might be some few examples of research done for my community that directly benefit us, research in general is more commonly a negative experience. This is because, as Reynolds and Reynolds (1970) argue, research and the consequent knowledge generated "has worked to make the power structure relatively more powerful and knowledgeable, and thereby to make the subject population more impotent and ignorant" (cited in Gaventa, 1993, p.27). For third world academics who often have little control of the research process in terms of research funding, loyalty to certain schools of thought in academic institutions and the consequent distribution of that knowledge, it would be a miracle to expect their experiences to play any significant role in the knowledge generated. I would therefore conclude like Gaveta that:

> Where knowledge is produced about the problems of the powerless, it is
> more often than not produced by the powerful in the interest of
> maintaining the status quo, rather than the powerless in the interest of
> change. (1993, p.26)

Because I'm historically situated within this traditionally powerless group described by Gaveta, my research had to be educative, a "dialogical approach to research that attempted to develop voice as a form of political process" (Pinar, 1995, p.259). All I had to do was "provide these individuals with a lens through which they could see themselves, become aware of new ideas, or recognize concepts that they were intuitively acting upon but that lacked clear articulation" (Goodman, 1991, cited in Pinar, 1995, p.259). Doing research this way would ensure greater collaboration with teachers. This interaction would become part of the curriculum change, thus, providing some skills that could be used long after I had left the field.

This study is therefore significant because it closes a little the ever present gap between the researcher and those targeted for research. Because of setting four criteria to

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guide my research: 1) it must not be research *on* "others"; 2) it must include the *shared*

experiences of all people involved in the research; 3) it must be *dialogic*; 4) and there

must be *sharing of skills* so that the process continues long after I had left, I have found

to some extent that my research was an educational process and a means of taking action

for change. This research made provision for the teachers to move beyond articulating

what they know (i.e. providing us with data) to theorizing about what they know (i.e.

creating meaning) and to transform their reality for social change (i.e. taking action). This

way of doing research created a space for advocacy and intervention, a process feminist

researchers refer to as *conscious subjectivity*, in which the model of a "distanced,

controlled, ostensibly neutral interviewer has been replaced with that of 'sisterhood,' an

engaged and sympathetic interaction between two individuals united by the fact of gender

oppression" (Patai, 1991, p.143). This way of doing research is morally defensible,

particularly for groups that have previously been disadvantaged by knowledge generated

through social science research.

Cutting Educational Costs.

An important significance of this study is its potential to cut educational costs. One of the

reasons education enrolment in Africa has stagnated, and in some countries has declined,

is because of the high cost of education (World Bank, 1995). Many parents in Kenya are

finding it increasingly difficult to enroll their children in schools because of the "high

cost of learning materials, and text books in particular" (UNICEF, 1989, p.104). It should

be noted that the regions of Kenya where enrolment is low also happen to be regions that

are generally poor (UNICEF, 1989). This study examines efficient use of locally

available resources. By using local knowledge and resources to enrich curriculum, the money which is spent on purchasing "externally packaged" knowledge such as text books can be used to develop other areas of education which will ultimately lower the general costs. This will mean that more parents will be able to afford to send their children to school.

Teacher Involvement in Curriculum Decisions

Another significance of this study is the potential it has for allowing teacher involvement in curriculum decisions. By inviting teachers to dialogue with the researcher, and to dialogue with each other, they will begin to feel that their words and experiences merit a valuable place in the curriculum they use in the classroom. Through participation, teachers get a concrete view of how they can contribute to curriculum change. They also begin to realize that by sharing their personal experiences and histories, they can begin to understand the source of some of their teaching practices and should therefore be accountable to that understanding. By so doing, they will seek changes.

Teacher Education

This study also has implications for teacher education in Kenya today. By not giving a conclusive report (some projects are ongoing), I acknowledge that curriculum problems are contextual and multidimensional, not to be encompassed by one theory and that they are never solved once and for all but require ongoing action (Scwab, 1971). Interpreting this for teacher education, it would mean that times are changing and it is no longer acceptable to produce "an encyclopedic Mr. Know-All, a transmitter of knowledge"

(Bishop, 1985, p.200). The new teacher should be one who is educable, "creator of desirable learning situations, helping his/[her] pupils to gain entry into the commonwealth of learning" (Bishop, 1985, p.200). The teacher of the future is one whose relationship with pupils will be more of a collaborative learning experience, based on mutual respect rather than domination. They will be teachers who will accept a more vigorous leadership in their communities and in their professional execution of their teaching role. The teachers of the future will be open to the input of other resource people in the community such as elders, people with special skills and careers. Such teachers must be aware that the students bring with them values from home developed through the interaction with environment in and around the home. What the students learn in school can either extend what perceptions students have about themselves or can destroy the image. They should therefore be teachers who are sensitive to the cultural values of the community in which the school is located, people who are familiar with the culture and language of the community around the school.

Breaking the Cultural Barriers: Placing Indigenous Cultures at the Center

According to the UNESCO director-general, Federico Mayor, the intergovernmental conference on cultural policies for development held recently in Stockholm, Sweden, marks a historic turning point in that, for the first time, political decision makers from all countries unanimously recognized the importance of culture for human dignity and the need to protect cultural identity and cultural diversity (Aduda, 1998). Central to this process is the re-socialization of the youth with their own culture, giving them a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage through education. The

UNESCO conference recommendation that to "enhance the cultural rights of minorities, [there has to be] the integration of culture in formal and non-formal education systems" (Aduda, 1998). It is against this background that the educators of indigenous children around the world face the challenging task of recovering the cultural heritage of indigenous people while "providing preparation for successful participation in a culturally diverse, modern technological society" (Hamme, 1996, p.21).

This study has the potential of validating, reclaiming and recovering local cultural values which will make the children see the possibility of creating employment in the community by use of local knowledge, wisdom and skills. As Tedla (1995) argues, the "uncritical and often unconscious absorption of the negative images projected about Africans through the media, music, books and the education system has led most of Africa's 'educated' young to use Western values in judging African sensibilities" (p.209). This study has involved the changing of attitudes that will enable us to legitimize and value our cultural heritage. By extension, those who proceed further in academic studies will want to return home to their communities to selectively communicate/share their knowledge and skills in a way that is of use to the community. Like Bogonko (1980), I argue that

> school curricula [should] be decolonized and given an African shape and content. The resulting education should aim at integrating the pupils into the lives of their families, their villages and their country. (p.66)

This study also has the potential of reducing rural "exodus"[8]. Africa, particularly Kenya, has in the past three decades experienced massive rural-urban migration. This problem and the consequent problems associated with rural-urban migration such as loss

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[8] Popular term for urban-rural migration

of human resources, brain drain, slum expansion and so forth, has been acknowledged and documented by academics and policy makers (Kenya Government, 1974-1978; Ndegwa, 1988). However, this problem is often addressed through slogans and "cosmetic" changes which often fail to take root. Some of the reasons for the rural-urban migration stem from the fact that the national curriculum in the present context prepares a graduate for "white-collar" jobs that are mainly to be found in urban areas. The curriculum also portrays the rural areas as being backward and lacking the social amenities of "civilized" living. This study has the potential of breaking the cultural barrier between the children and their community. By using locally available and culturally relevant resources in the classroom, the children will begin to see the knowledge and values they bring from home as a valuable and important component to their learning. By so doing, the children will begin to identify their role in the community and want to assume personal development for its development and sustenance.

This way of thinking is not new, and indigenous people around the world have much to learn from each other. Integrating conceptual elements of traditional and contemporary First Nations culture into the curriculum, teachers of First Nations children in Canada use the local resources as visual aids to show the connection between the learners and their immediate environment (MacIvor, 1995). A principal of a band-controlled school said the following:

> Any time we can integrate the Native perspective in any area being taught, we do so [although] no definite program is set up yet. For example in science....Trees we read the legend, How the birch got its marks. We then bring in Native words (trees, barks, leaves) ... respecting nature as our ancestors did. (Maina, 1995, p.105)

Another example of this kind of classroom integration of traditional culture and modern

technology in Canada is the Computers and Culture Project, in which secondary school

First Nations students in British Columbia used computer and video technology to learn

how to preserve the culture, language and history of the Native Carrier people (Hamme,

1996).

> Cultural information was gathered through student interviews with parents and
> tribal elders, guest speakers, and observation and cultural events. The information
> was then entered by the students into the computer and stored in a videodisc. The
> students thus became more familiar with their traditional culture while learning
> computer skills and gaining experience in analyzing and organizing large amounts
> of information. (Hamme, 1996, p.29)

Another way in which cultural elements can be integrated in the classroom is

through oral history, stories and songs, which are important First Nations instructional

techniques (Archibald, 1990). The main source of oral history, stories and songs in First

Nation culture are the elders, who are also the upholders of morality and cultural wisdom.

Elders give accurate information because they have the wisdom of their years to guide

them.

> There was no room for error because an error handed down in future generations
> would be a grand distortion. If truths were to be passed along, they had to be
> passed along correctly. Even simple parables had to have the same meticulous
> memorization. (Brown Jr., 1988, p.157)

Beside the knowledge that would be integrated into the curriculum, elders'

characteristics would serve as models for curriculum outcomes. Elders in the First Nation

culture give an identity to the community through the interpretation of events and history

in a manner that is immediately relevant (Couture, 1978). Integrating cultural concepts in

the classroom would not only cause elders to be viewed as providers of knowledge

related to "legends, history, personal counseling, hand sign language, Indian religious

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values" (Medicine, 1987, p.148), but their attributes would provide a good example of what culturally relevant pedagogy can produce.

> The elders' intelligence, excellent memory capacity and discursive ability are cognitive behavior which students would do well to examine in order to understand what psycho-cultural variables combine to include high level development of the faculties. (Couture, 1978, p.129)

In the absence of elders, there are recorded First Nation oral history, stories and songs can provide answers to important questions of life (Archibald, 1990), and have lessons which are relevant to contemporary issues. The story "Coyote's Eyes" in which coyote sees through the eyes of different animals is a good illustration of the usefulness of being flexible enough to focus on the worldview appropriate to differing situations (Hamme, 1996). However, the story gives warning that using other people's eyes to view ourselves can be destructive. The lesson from this story then is that we can only be flexible in as far as that flexibility serves our own needs.

Integration of traditional First Nation cultural values with education for the contemporary world has also been achieved through the use of the sacred circle/hoop, otherwise known as the medicine wheel (Hampton, 1995; Calliou, 1995). Hampton (1995), for instance, uses a medicine typology as an organizing tool to discuss principles and boundaries in the redefinition and theory of Indian education. For Hampton, Indian education must enhance Aboriginal consciousness of what it means to be Indian, thus empowering and enriching individual and collective lives (Battiste, 1995). Calliou (1995) also uses a medicine wheel model for a peacekeeping pedagogy in which she shares her personal reflections on racism and multiculturalism built from within the medicine wheel and the Iroquois Great Law of peace. The way these educators use the medicine wheel provides a unique model of understanding the continuum and interconnectedness of the

events surrounding First Nations education in the contemporary world. Borrowing selectively from each other can enable indigenous educators around the world to break the cultural barriers that characterize much of the present curriculum. They can begin to place culture at the center of curriculum, be it in Kenya or Canada.

AFTERWORD

A lot has happened in the Kenyan educational landscape since I left the field. A committee has been appointed by President Moi of Kenya to review the curriculum and make recommendations to the Ministry of Education. The committee is inviting views from stakeholders across the country on how best to "facilitate a review of the education system" (Daily Nation, 1998). I'm hoping that my research partners will take this opportunity to present their views to the committee.

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CONSENT FORM
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CONSENT FORM

I,_____ AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AS DESCRIBED IN THE LETTER ABOVE. **I WILL ALSO KEEP A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY OWN RECORD.**

_____   _____
SIGNATURE   DATE

APPENDIX D
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Sample questions for the initial interviews

(A general follow-up question for many of these questions is to ask for specific examples).

Why did you/do you want to get involved in Cultural Relevance in the School Curriculum study?
What attracted you to it?
What were/are you seeking that Cultural Relevance in the School Curriculum seem/ed to offer?
What does Cultural Relevance in School Curriculum mean to you?

What does it mean to develop a culturally relevant curriculum for students? What would students gain from such a curriculum?

Can you describe one class you feel will be particularly successful in using locally available resources which are also culturally relevant? What factors would contribute to such success?

Can you describe one class that you feel would not particularly be successful in using locally available resources which are also culturally relevant? What factors would contribute to such lack of success?

Can you describe one class/course that you feel hesitant in using culturally relevant resources that are also culturally relevant? What factors have contributed in you feeling this way?

What are some of the crucial issues/concerns/problems you anticipate to face as you try to use locally available resources which are also culturally relevant?
How would you like to address these issues/concerns/problems? By initiating an individual project or as part of a collaborative action research group?

Sample questions for the final interview

The final interview will be based on the meetings and experiences of the group as teachers inquirers and thus are more difficult to identify specifically at this time.

General questions related to the following areas will be included:

In what ways has this group process enhanced or illuminated your understanding of cultural relevance in school curriculum?

Are there questions about cultural relevance in school curriculum that continue to engage you?

What aspects of the collaborative action research have assisted/have not assisted you as a teacher? In what ways?

Did the collaborative action research group benefit you in other ways? Please elaborate

Would you recommend collaborative action research as a way to engage in curriculum change? Why or why not?