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Democracy, ethics and social justice: Implications for secondary school leadership in Kenya

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Principals in Kenyan schools are required to adopt democratic school leadership practises as part of the government policy. Adopting an interpretive case study, this paper set out to explore the application of democracy, ethics and social justice in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was in two phases. Phase one: twelve school principals were interviewed to explore their perspectives on democratic school leadership and establish the rationale for selecting two case schools. Phase two: an in-depth case study was conducted in the two schools. Interviews, focus group discussions, observation and informal conversations were used to generate data. The findings suggest that the principals, teachers and students each perceive and apply democratic school leadership differently based on individual as well as the school socio-cultural context. These contrasting views provide grounds for further discourse on the phenomenon. The paper recommends formal training for principals through in-service courses. Inclusion of democratic school leadership principles in teacher training programmes and an inculcation of democratic school leadership practices/values in the school curriculum for students to create a shared vision and understanding of these concepts for the success of the school.

Keywords: democracy; ethics; leadership practices; social justice

Introduction

The Kenyan Government in adhering to the enactment of the UN charter on the rights of the child, requires school principals to adopt democratic school leadership practices. Similarly, the national goals of education (Republic of Kenya, 1964:21–25) emphasises education that gives opportunities to "every child", "promotes social justice, equality and foster a sense of social responsibility and nationalism." However, despite this policy directive, very little attention has been paid to the practice in schools, coupled with a paucity of research in Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa on democratic school leadership. The purpose of this paper is to explore the application of democracy, ethics and social justice in secondary schools in Kenya and emanates from a study conducted to establish the students', teachers' and principals' perceptions of democratic school leadership. The literature unpacks the concept democracy, democratic school leadership, ethical rationality and social justice in relation to democratic school leadership.

This study, though conducted in Kenya, appeals to an international readership, and is applicable globally as the key tenets of democracy, ethics and social justice are core values to education practitioners worldwide. Furthermore, democratic school leadership like caring leadership is pegged on valuing people within organisations and could apply to other sectors.

Literature Review

Democracy is an avidly contested concept, thus fruitful discussion about its nature and connection to education practices should acknowledge a diverse range of discursive traditions and allegiances pertaining to it (Fielding, 2007). Studies that explore these and how they are practised in different contexts are essential, and as PA Woods and Gronn (2009) point out, there have always been different ways and means of expressing democratic principles. Nevertheless, democracy has been defined as a system of government involving all eligible members of a state, typically through elected representatives (Soanes & Stevenson, 2003). In this sense, Louis (2003:94–95) identifies three dominant paradigms of democratic societies: liberal, social and participatory democracy. In liberal democracies, the purpose of society is to benefit the individuals' development. Public education is prioritised, as the polity's responsibility is to support the individual in becoming autonomous.

Social democracy emphasises social rights and equality and is identified with welfare states such as the Scandinavian Countries (Louis, 2003). Emphasis is on group cohesiveness and the importance of redistributing social goods, including education (Møller, 2009). Protection of vulnerable classes of students is stressed. Møller adds distinguishing features of these countries' model of education include equity, participation and a welfare state. This resonates with South Africa's citizenship education, that aims to foster patriotism for obligation, solidarity, citizenship and flourishing by focusing on equity, social justice and diversity (Horstemke, Siyakwazi, Walton & Wolhuter, 2013).

Participatory democracy presumes participation and ownership, based on the Greek ideal of citizenship (Louis, 2003). Here, schools 'belong' to an identified local community, which is responsible for determining purpose and process. Most developed countries share in the conversations reflected by the three models. Du Toit and Forlin (2009) extol inclusive education as the gateway to a democratic and just society, and schools should

promote this by inculcating inclusive values. Inclusive education (Engelbrecht, 2006) is in harmony with a democracy that values human dignity, freedom and equality.

Louis (2003) reiterates that, regardless of how distinctive these philosophies are on paper, the situation is different in practice, as every democratic system contains its own contradictions between beliefs and actions. However, her argument suggests that the adoption of democratic policies into contexts where cultural practices do not conform to democratic ideals can cause tension. This applies to Kenya, and many developing countries such as South Africa, whose 'democratic' political systems have been adopted from the developed countries into a context that Kabeberi (2007) considers unfavourable culturally, socially and economically.

Democratic school leadership

Democracy in schools is viewed as a form of social living, where individuals live and conduct their affairs within a sense of belonging to a community exercising mutual care for its members (Starratt, 2004). Essentially, democratic school leadership focuses on the cultivation of an environment that supports participation, sharing of ideas, honesty, openness, flexibility, and compassion. School leaders, therefore, should employ participatory approaches and ethics of social justice through structures that enable student and teacher views to be included in the decision-making process.

Ngubane (2005) indicates that school-based decision-making requires quality leadership and participative management. This can be attained if school management boards are competent, have open communication, build on trust and honesty and a shared vision and values, collective responsibility, reflective professional inquiry and collaboration (Owen, 2005).

Ethical rationality and democratic school leadership

Ethical rationality aims to create an environment in which people are encouraged and supported in aspiring to 'truths' about the world (Woods, GJ & Woods, 2008). They observe that the expression and reinforcement of a commitment to an aspiration to 'truth', which PA Woods (2006:331) refers to as "the kernel of ethical rationality", are integral to the development of human potential. Hence, one of the functions of leadership in a democratic school is to "engage people in processes that cause them to construct new knowledge" (Woods, PA 2006:331). PA Woods emphasises that a principal of a democratically managed school explains the importance of the collaborative approach, in terms of finding the right way and the best ideas.

PA Woods' ethical rationality relates to Starratt's (1991) ethic of critique, ethic of justice and ethic of care, each of which complements the others in a developmental context of practice. Similarly, Begley and Zaretsky (2004:641) contend that "our rational professional justifications for democratic leadership in schools are grounded in the nature of the school leadership role, the social contexts of the communities, as well as an ideological social mandate." The payoff to this form of leadership occurs when understanding the value orientations of others provide leaders with information on how they might best influence the practices of others towards the achievement of broadly justifiable social objectives. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) emphasise building consensus around a shared social objective in schools.

Møller (2006) identifies an ethic of care and a concern for the common good as elements of democratic school leadership. The ethic of care seeks to establish whether the students feel that the teachers trust them and express a caring attitude towards them. It encourages teachers and students to accept one another for who they are, and requires the principal to have open communication with the teachers regarding their welfare and school activities. Social events organised to develop oneness among members of the school community are key. This suggests that care and teamwork are crucial ingredients in democratic school leadership. Samuel and Van Wyk (2008:138) on a teachers' roles categorise them as "within classroom roles", such as being a "learning mediator", an "assessor" and a "designer of learning programmes", as well as "outside-of-classroom roles", such as being "a researcher", "a lifelong learner", and a "community practitioner executing pastoral roles." They reiterate that policy makers recognise the need to appreciate the social, cultural and political role of schooling as follows:

> "Teaching does not occur in a vacuum of specific contexts, where the dynamics of particular groups of learners, physical and financial resources predispose the teacher to make strategic choices linked to the specific environment and the ethos of the school culture which is driven by its own internal standards, especially around matters of diversity" (Samuel &Van Wyk, 2008:138).

Schooling is therefore a situated and an interpretative act, and ethical rationality enables participation by all striving towards human progress and good values.

Social justice and democratic school leadership

Social justice is promoted by engendering respect for diversity and reducing cultural and material inequalities (Woods, GJ & Woods, 2008). This entails a collective obligation, which enables everyone to participate and work towards fulfilling their human potential. Social justice constitute the fair and just distribution of resources, respect and opportunities, as well as the eradication of social

patterns of exploitation, domination and denigration (Woods, PA 2005).

Schooling, according to Shields and Mohan (2008), is meant to help students achieve individual success and employment and form the basis of a robust civil society, thus, schools must provide safe spaces and an education that promotes equity and social justice. They contend that educators cannot ignore the multiple forms of social, cultural and economic capital their students bring into their schools, and must take steps to provide an education that challenges and overcomes inequities. They assert that teachers can and should develop pedagogical understandings that make the classroom inclusive, equitable, and democratic.

Questions abound on what constitutes social justice. Johnson (2008:311) contends that postmodern concerns reject claims of a universal definition of social justice. They however, seek to identify and describe the multiple meanings of social justice at play in the collective and the power differentials perpetuated. Postmodernists therefore question any enactments of social justice from the perspective of the 'advantaged.' Interpretivists concur, identifying points of convergence between members of the collective. They attempt to enhance the stability of the collective by moving toward a consensual definition of social justice encouraging a culture of dialogue. Despite the varied paradigmatic views, Shields and Mohan (2008) emphasise that consideration of students' lived experiences will enable teachers to understand students' varied socio-economic backgrounds. This knowledge is fundamental in enabling teachers provide all students with appropriate instruction and equitable learning opportunities based on individual needs.

Research Questions

In the context of this paper, it was essential to raise questions such as:

- What do the principals, teachers and students consider as democracy, social justice and ethics in the learning/working environment?
- How do the principals, teachers and students ensure democracy, social justice and ethics in the learning/working environment?

Conceptual Framework

The paper adopted the developmental conception of democratic practice and the elements of democratic school leadership in practice as a conceptual lens (Fielding, 2007; Woods, GJ & Woods, 2008; Woods, PA 2006). GJ Woods and Woods (2008) and PA Woods (2006) argue that a developmental conception of democratic practice is broader than the view of democracy and democratic school leadership as mere voting regularly for leaders, and is the model most relevant to education.

PA Woods further summarises the model into six interlinking aims (rationalities), namely: human potential (presupposes that each individual has untapped potential which can be brought to bear in the decision making process); ethical rationality (aims to create an environment in which people are encouraged and supported in aspiring to 'truths' about the world); decisional rationality (aims to disperse decision-making so that individuals are active contributors to the creation of the institutions, culture and relationships they inhabit); therapeutic rationality (concerns the creation of well-being, social cohesion and positive feelings of involvement through participation and shared leadership); and discursive rationality, based on dialogue and discussion, as well as "open debate and the operation of dialogic and deliberative democracy" (Woods, PA 2006:323). Cook-Sather (2006) prefer to see it as a 'speak with' rather than a 'speak for' approach. Lastly, social justice (is fair and just distribution of resources, respect and opportunities, as well as the eradication of social patterns of exploitation, domination and denigration) (Woods, GJ & Woods, 2008; Woods, PA 2005, 2006). These rationalities, as PA Woods articulates, "analytically distinguish the complementary and interacting dimensions of democratic leadership and practice and have their own distinctive focus, priorities and consequences" (2006:328).

Methodology

The study was an ethnographic case study (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004) grounded in commitment to first-hand experience and exploration of school settings via participant observation. The data were collected in two phases. Phase One lasted three months, and the 12 school principals interviewed here formed a basis/rationale for the selection of the two case schools. The data from the 12 principals have not been used in this paper. P1 (Case One School) and P10 (Case Two School) were selected for the second phase of the study. P1 was selected because she considered her leadership practices democratic, while P10 was selected because, in her view, democratic leadership was not suitable for her school. Phase two lasted three months. It involved spending six weeks in a Case One School and another six weeks in a Case Two School, generating data using interviews, focus group discussion, informal conversations and observations. P1 was a national secondary boarding girls' school (that admits students aged between 14 to 18 years of age from the whole country), with over 70 teachers, and about 800 students.

Interviews were conducted with the Principal and eight teachers, based on the willingness to be interviewed, and their availability. The sample included representation from each of the three management tiers in the school - senior, middle, and junior. The senior management team included: the principal, deputy principal, the director of

studies and the chaplain. The middle team included: three out of eight heads of department (HODs), and two out of fifteen subject teachers. The junior team included three out of forty-three ordinary classroom teachers. The sample was intended to ensure that the three demographic parameters based on the seniority of the teachers were captured. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

Informal conversations were held to explore issues that emerged from the observations, they occurred before or after the interviews and a research journal was used to note down the issues covered. They did not follow any specific pattern and were not tape-recorded. As Pole and Morrison (2003) observe, conversations are a major element in any kind of ethnography field research both as a source of data and as a method. Informal conversations were held with a group of teachers or one teacher over general issues about education and in the process matters came up that were related to the study, in which case the matter was pursued and relevant points noted soon after the conversations. Another type involved seeking clarifications from the teachers/students over a phenomenon that was observed in the school. For example, in P1, a student led a sermon on a Wednesday morning in the school chapel attended by all the students, as well as the majority of the teachers. After the sermon, an informal conversation was held with the Chaplain to find out who organised the services, and how the students who led were picked.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) were held with the students from all forms (SA equivalent Grade 8 to 12) and prefects and took place during the same data gathering process of three months. Each form/grade held its FGD separately, with those in form one (Gr 8) being first and the prefects coming last. Thus, each group was relatively homogeneous in terms of power relations. This was because it would be easier to seek clarification on issues that emerge from the younger students from the mature students and the prefects. The students were identified with the help of the teachers on duty.[i] The teacher asked the class prefect to randomly select students within the same class to attend the FGD. The teacher did not have knowledge of the specific issues that would be discussed, thus, the approach did not pose any threat to the credibility of the study. Each of the FGDs lasted approximately one hour, comprised 12–16 students, and were conducted after class (4pm-5pm). While the ideal FGD should comprise 5–8 people, some students decided to join the FGDs of their own volition and it would be rude to send them away. This was handled by reducing the discussion period. The initial data analysis was done before the next FGD to pick out emerging issues that could be followed up on in the next FGD. The sessions were audio-recorded after getting the relevant assent (since the students are boarders and come from all over the country, the consent from the school management was sufficient).

Observation has been characterised as the fundamental base of all research methods in social and behavioural sciences, and as the mainstay of ethnographic study (Atkinson & Hammersley, 2007; Hammersley, 2006). It is useful for ethnography and case studies (Lichtman, 2006) because it occurs in settings that already exist, rather than in contrived settings. Atkinson and Hammersley (2007) emphasise that even studies that rely mainly on interviewing as a data collection technique employ observation to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed. In both case schools, observations involved going to each school every morning to evening (8am-5pm), from Monday to Friday, for six weeks. It focused on specific areas, such as the staffrooms, school assemblies, classrooms, as well as isolated functions e.g. church services, games and a school cultural day (Case One School). This gave the advantage of 'shadowing' teachers through normal life, witnessing first hand and in detail the events and practices of interest (Denscombe, 1998). These were regularly written down as brief notes of the observed phenomena. We also noted overheard comments, remarks and discussions by the teachers, for example, teachers commenting about discipline among students, and how they (teachers) handle such matters. Teacher picked on students to undertake specific duties within the school. Only the issues relevant to the study were noted down.

P10 was a district secondary girls' boarding school located in a rural area, with about 272 students drawn from the locality and 18 teachers. Six teachers and the Principal were interviewed. Unlike in P1, where all the teachers were teachers service commission (TSC)[ii] employees, seven teachers in P10 were board of governors (BoG)[iii] employees. The teachers were divided into senior and junior teachers, based on the positions they held in the school. The senior teachers interviewed were the deputy principal, one TSC employed head of department (HoD) and one BoG employed HoD. The junior teachers interviewed were two TSC and one BoG teacher. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Notes on informal conversations held with teachers on matters observed and relevant to the study, such as corporal punishment, admission of new students, and overcrowded classrooms, were taken. The FGDs comprised students in all forms/grades and the prefects. The students were identified with the help of the teacher on duty. Each FGD lasted approximately one hour (4pm-5pm), were con-

ducted after classes, and were audio-recorded after obtaining the relevant assent. Observations were confined to the staffroom, school assembly, lessons and games. The fact that students from P10 came from the locality (within the administrative District) was important for the study, because the disparity between the two schools would help identify if this diversity would be a major factor influencing social justice, even if the curriculum were basically the same across the country.

Thematic analysis was used to categorise the data generated. The initial step involved 'open' coding, which entailed developing categories of information from the data by examining the transcripts and field notes or salient categories of information supported by the text, for example, students' voice, equity, justice etc. The next stage was 'axial' coding, which involved interconnecting the categories identified in open coding, relating this to central phenomenon from the database. The final stage, viz. 'selective' coding, involved building a story that connected the categories (Creswell, 2013), and picking out extracts that best illustrated the themes, identifying complementary and contrasting points of view from the various data sources. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured through coding of the data. For example, C1-T1 means Case One interview one and C2-FGD3 is Case Two focus group discussion three. All necessary ethical considerations were observed. Authenticity and trustworthiness of data collected was ensured through credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability, in other words, a step by step description of the data generation process undertaken to eliminate personal bias (Yin, 2009). Eisenhart (2006:573) suggests credibility of a study can increase through the use of concepts from the literature, excerpts and direct quotes from the data sources, which he terms "having been there." Jwan and Ong'ondo (2011) concur, saying credibility can be assured by establishing 'a chain of evidence.' In this paper, a step-by-step description of the data generation process was provided, alongside excerpts and direct quotations.

Discussion

Teachers' Perception on Democracy, Ethics and Social Justice

Though the majority of teachers interviewed felt they treated one another with care and respect, they held contrasting views on the issue. One teacher in P1 argued that while there were those who treated her with respect, there were also those who did not. She stated that a few teachers exhibited care based on ethnic considerations. This, she claimed, had been heightened by the political division in the country at the time, as many Kenyans define their support for political parties through ethnic affiliation. However, some teachers have stated that they treated one another with care and respect despite their political and ethnic affiliations:

> "We relate quite well. Yes, we may have some 'camps' but they are not so pronounced because we try as much as possible to be one, but you can't rule out those 'camps.' I personally try not to be in any 'camp', but because of my name,[iv] people would just say this one is for this political party. You know that mentality" [senior teacher: C1-T7].

A teacher whose parent's home was burnt down during the 2007 post-election violence and who came from an ethnic community that was considered 'foreign' in the school, explained that although she was treated with care and respect there were a lot of political undertones from colleagues:

> "We do not have obvious divisions in the staff except when political debate is rife, we can have tea together and as much as I would want to participate, I'm very careful, because I belong to a minority ethnic community. However, when the 2008 conflict became so bad, several of my colleagues called me to find out if I was safe. I was also given a school-house [a staff house in the school compound], just in case I feel unsafe in my current residence [*sic*]. Although we have different political affiliations, we still care for one another" [Junior teacher: C1-T6].

Most of the teachers interviewed felt the Principal treated them with care and respect:

> "We don't even refer to her with the title 'Principal', she is our mother. And, the way she relates with us is the same way a mother relates with the children, very understanding, very humane. She is always ready to listen to us. She understands that this is a national school with students and teachers from all over this country" [Middle–level teacher: C1-T3].

The Principal concurred that she tried to make all the teachers feel welcome, cared for and respected:

> "I don't know! You cannot rule out that there are people who prefer to work together, but we have not had any problem. I think people are free to oppose an issue [*sic*]. In fact, the people who give me hard time are usually the people I trust to work with. They say 'madam that is wrong' and we discuss until we agree. I also encourage them that when they have an issue, they should come and discuss it so that everybody is comfortable and promotions of teachers are always on merit" [Principal: C1-T9].

These views on ethnic affiliations were not surprising, because in Kenya, ethnic community cultures are stronger than the national culture, and people this is what people tend to build relationships based on this.

In P10, the teachers unanimously agreed that the principal treated them with care seen by the amount of time he spent with them in the staffroom. All teachers reiterated that they cared and respected one another regardless of their ethnic backgrounds. One teacher stated:

> "We tend to help each other where there is need. We don't even know who is senior or junior,

> employed by the BoG or the TSC. And, we have a welfare association where we each contribute two hundred shillings a month to assist members when bereaved or blessed with a baby" [junior teacher: C2-T2].

The above excerpts indicate, the teachers viewed democracy, ethics and social justice as a cultural practice (from an African perspective) seeing it as fair treatment, respect and a sense of belonging. This resonates with Ngubane's (2005) view that trust, honesty, a shared vision and values are important elements of care. Similarly, Møller (2006) identifies an ethic of care and a concern for the common good as elements of democratic school leadership.

Students' Perception on Democracy, Ethics and Social Justice

In both schools most of the students felt that the principals treated them in a just and ethical manner. In P1, the students gave an instance when a student was hospitalised and the Principal allowed other students to visit her in hospital. The students viewed this as care and concern. In P10, most of the students felt the Principal exhibited care when dealing with them on school fees related matters.

The students' view is consistent with Stefkovich and Begley's (2007) argument that genuine regard for student's best interests is a major influence on principal leadership practices: principal's valuation processes are heavily oriented towards a concern for the students' well-being and their response when confronted with ethical dilemmas suggests that the best interests of students feature prominently as the ultimate influence on these administrators' decision making.

In P10, the teachers viewed the provision of school uniform and the requirement that all students keep short hair as a sign of equality:

> We make sure that all students are equal by the form of dressing i.e. the school provides their uniform, once they are all in uniform, they are all equal. We also ensure that all the girls keep short hair [senior teacher: C2-T6].

The care was also extended to new students in the school. In an informal conversation with one teacher (C2-T5), she explained that they had a case where an orphaned student could not raise money to buy her requirements. The Principal, the teachers and students raised money for all her requirements and "the other students are treating her so well her background not withstanding" [Junior: C2-T5]. GJ Woods and Woods (2008) claim ethical rationality invokes commitment to truth and appreciation of positive human potential. This entails self-reflection, open-mindedness and an understanding that this profoundly influences students' lives (Stefkovich & Begley, 2007).

However, in both case schools, some students maintained that some teachers did not treat them fairly. For example teachers who gossiped and made negative comments on students in class (cf. p. 4). Teachers did not seem to be aware of the students' feelings towards them regarding favouritism and gossip, however, Strømstad (2003) argues, teachers should develop and create a climate of democratic culture and tolerance. Social justice entails fairness and respect.

Academic Families

This was a system used in P10 to give students an informal forum to express themselves and discuss personal matters with teachers:

> The Principal involves us a lot in management, she has helped us to form families with students, and every teacher is assigned a number of girls. We meet every two weeks to discuss varied problems [*sic*] both academic and non-academic. It helps improve on discipline. We warn them that 'I don't want to see my children in the staffroom being punished' [junior teacher: C2-T5].

Most students concurred that the family system enhanced teachers' care for them:

> Yes, I believe that teachers have a caring attitude towards students because like now we have been grouped and given teachers to act as our parents. We usually have meetings on Thursday and we are free to tell them any problem we have and get assistance [student: C2-FGD1].

However, the observations indicated, the family meetings lacked the personal engagement mentioned above as the discussions appeared to focus on formal matters such as career choices. In one of the 'family' meeting days, the Principal asked the teachers to go and discuss career choices, in another, she asked the teachers to discuss "grooming and neatness for girls and how to relate with boys." One teacher explained that if there was a topic that needed to be discussed with the students, e.g. sexuality, then the teachers would read on the topic and they would discuss in the staffroom and agree on how to present it to the students. Nevertheless, the importance of such forums is highlighted by Mitra (2006) in a study conducted in three schools in San Francisco designed to find 'best case' scenarios of student voice efforts. She points out that student forums (student-focused activities) were intended to help teachers to gain a better understanding of student perspectives. Overall, the forums were meant to help reduce tension and increase informality between teachers and students.

Care and Respect among Students

Students in both schools had contrasting views on care and respect, some regarded it as an absence from bullying, others as respecting someone's personal belongings, others as one's socio-economic background and equal treatment for all. Stefkovich and Begley (2007) assert that while having rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing the claims of other and self, responsibility rests on an understanding that gives

rise to compassion and care. Thus, responsibility is an important component of the ethic of care. For students to be treated with care and respect, they too must reciprocate. One teacher [C1-T6] commented that some students cared for one another, depending on their socio-economic background.

To facilitate care among students, the teachers organised induction conferences for new students to instil the virtue of care and respect and allocated them school mums.[v]

Equal Care for All Students

The teachers in both schools asserted that they treated all the students equally. They drew attention to the school uniform and the fact that students were not allowed to have more than one thousand Kenya shillings (about R700) in the school. In P10, all the girls kept short hair whilst in P1 they were allowed to keep long hair but not use 'chemicals' relaxers. The irony in the teachers' claims is that while they believed they were trying to make the students appear equal, they did not realise they were denying them the right of 'choice'. Shields and Mohan (2008) argue that although social justice may not 'make up' for the disadvantages experienced by some students, it is still the only meaningful way to address the needs of disparate student groups by creating a more equitable playing field. However, this argument raises a potential tension between the school culture and the students' cultural background because creating a learning environment that reflects the background of one group may in a way disadvantage another group. They add that it is central to an educator's ability to create learning environments in which all children experience success, can become curious, inquiring and critically reflective.

Some students commented that the teachers tended to care more for those who performed well in their subjects: Excerpt from a student in P10:

> I think teachers don't treat us equally. Some teachers care more for those who pass well in their subjects. And our parents are also treated differently. For example, when my parent comes to the school riding a bicycle or walking and my friend's parent comes driving a Toyota Prado [*sic*]. The teacher will tend to recognise the one in a Prado [*sic*] which is unfair [student: C2-FGD2].

A similar view was expressed by a student in P1:

> Our Business teacher seems to like the students who do well in the subject and ignore those who do not perform very well. For example, if you do not perform well in the subject and you are not in class the teacher will not bother asking, but for some students, the teacher will always ask where the student is [student: C1- FGD3].

Principals' Perceptions on Democracy, Ethics and Social Justice

Both principals indicated that they relied on trial and error as their college training prepared them for roles as classroom teachers and not for the kind of democratic school leadership expected of them when they became principals, P1 states:

> I used coercion and persuasion to run the school. Earlier on, it was okay for a principal to run the school without involving others. But that is now outdated. The principal of today is not the sole decision-maker. She is the coordinator in the new management arrangement. So, now I encourage teachers to be more democratic when dealing with students. We need to consult the students and get ideas on what they need. Students have good ideas on how to be taught, how to manage themselves. We now ask students about their meals and the way it should be cooked, which was never the case before [P1].

P1 further explained that the school culture was instrumental, they had developed a strategic plan, vision, mission, motto, school anthem and school rules every teacher and student who joined the school was inducted in the ideals and values of the school through a week long induction programme. Another issue raised by P1 was equal treatment of all students based on religious principles of Christianity/Islam, thus religion served as an agent of enhancing school culture. Lastly she indicated that teachers were involved in the school structure through various committees such as financial management, guidance and counselling, disciplinary, academic boards, games. This facilitated democratic school leadership because it made clear the roles of each group of teachers in a committee preventing duplication of roles. It also helped students know where their concerns could be addressed.

Both principals bemoaned the lack of clear guidelines on how to practice democratic school leadership. P10 reiterated her stance that democratic school leadership was not suitable for her school as

> I have tried holding barazas [Swahili word for informal public meetings] like two weeks ago I had a baraza with the form four students to get their views on what they needed. At class level democracy may work but at times the students want to blame the teachers, the administration and this interferes with the working atmosphere because the teachers get offended [P10].

She gave an example where the Government insisted that principals charge school fees based on 1997 fee guidelines despite current inflation rates. She reiterated that the government lauds involvement of stakeholders in decision making yet the Ministry of Education rarely involved principals in the decision they make that affect schools "preaching water and drinking wine." Samuel and Van Wyk (2008) contend a school culture/ethos, driven by a schools' internal standards, such as diversity concerns are fundamental.

Limitations

The case study while not allowing for statistical generalization, can allow for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, involving more schools may have provided more insights to the study considering the diverse and distinct socio-cultural orientations of the many ethnic communities in Kenya. However, this being a qualitative study, the empirical evidence generated may contribute to our understanding of the views held and application of democracy, ethics and social justice in these specific schools and not necessarily to make wider claims to generalisation. The two case schools represent schools in Kenya which are either national or district schools and the issues raised may resonate with other schools in Kenya with similar characteristics.

Educational Implications

Democratic school leadership was practised in both schools, however, there were instances when it was not evident. This can compromise learning as inclusive classroom environments require educators to clearly distinguish between students' ability versus their opportunity to learn (Shields & Mohan, 2008). We concur with this view that consideration of students' lived experiences will help teachers and principals to understand and differentiate students' needs striving to provide all with equitable learning opportunities.

The perceptions of democratic school leadership did not vary much between the two case schools and appeared confined to participation in decision-making and the rights of students and teachers to express their views freely. However, a lot of practices within the schools can be considered democratic.

Principals' cited lack of guidelines on implementing the government policy. The principals' teachers' and students' 'rational' perceptions of democratic school leadership (which were not significantly different from the elements of democracy discussed in literature) did not appear to inform their practices rather the 'culturally embedded' perceptions, influenced their school practices. This is contrary to the stated national goals of education. These contrasting views call for further discourse on the phenomenon. We recommend:

- A recognition of the cultural conception of democracy, ethics and social justice in school practices;
- Formal training for principals through in-service courses on democratic school leadership, ethics and social justice;
- School ethos that inculcate democracy, ethics and social justice.

Notes

i. In Kenya, a teacher who is in charge of school programmes for the week is commonly referred to as "The Teacher on Duty."

ii. In Kenya a TSC teacher is a teacher employed by the Teachers Service Commission (equivalent to the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and is a permanent employee.

iii. A BoG teacher is a teacher employed by the Board of Governors (similar to the School governing board-SGB) and is usually a contractual appointment.

iv. In Kenya, one's ethnicity can be identified from their surname because some ethnic communities have names unique to them.

v. A school mum is where a senior student (grade 9) is assigned to a new student (grade 8) as a mother to teach them the ropes of settling into life in boarding school.

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