In recent years, the theorising of multiple forms of social difference under the term *diversity* has also become of interest to the field of education research because it enables specific angles for recognising, looking at and deconstructing inequality and disadvantage. Yet, thinking about difference in educational settings, and especially in schools, is not new. Existing theoretical avenues that draw on current debates mainly in the United States, South Africa and Europe help to better understand and analyse the biographically and professionally related diversity perceptions, experiences and professional practices of Kenyan teachers. In European countries, the notion of diversity in education has been mainly of interest from migration-centred and anti-racist perspectives. I will include some of these debates exemplary from Germany because they provide relevant deconstructionist perspectives for this book.7

**Diversity: What kind of difference?**

*Diversity* has a long tradition in various disciplines and subject fields: genetic diversity, workplace diversity, biological diversity, human diversity, cultural diversity and many other diversities have been subjects of study. Hence, Walgenbach (2017) talks of diversity as a travelling concept between disciplines and regions, lately gaining influence in education sciences outside the Anglo-
American language area. The various discourses, concepts, policies and strategies referring to diversity illustrate the current popularity of the term in various political, social, educational, scientific and private business arenas:

While it can [be] argued whether or not the present is actually characterized by more social difference than earlier periods, one thing is for sure: the current period is pervaded with discourses about diversity. (Vertovec 2012: 287)

Vertovec (2014) ascribes the immense interest in diversity partly to the success of identity-based political and public campaigns such as, for example, women’s, African American, anti-apartheid, LGBTIQ, disability-based and other movements around the world. Similarly, Czollek et al. (2009) state that the notion of diversity as generated in scientific and philosophical concepts, as well as in political and social movements in the US and elsewhere in the 1960s, is closely linked to the struggle for the recognition and participation of marginalised social groups. It is therefore inherently connected to questions of social (in)equality (Banks 2015; Czollek et al. 2009).

The basic definition of diversity, found in the Merriam Webster dictionary, is:

The condition of having or being composed of differing elements, e.g. the inclusion of different types of people (such as people of different races or cultures) in a group or organization.\textsuperscript{8}

Diversity as variety, multiplicity of difference, dissimilitude or unlikeness in a sociological framing focuses on social and cultural diversity and, hence, on collective identities as opposed to genetic aspects of difference (Haring-Smith 2012).

A significant body of literature on diversity in education refers to international debates on inclusion, the right to quality education for all and special needs education (Ainscow et al. 2019). According to Hauenschild et al. (2013), diversity represents
DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

a discourse about social differences and broaches the issue of adequate political, educational, economic and legal responses to pluralistic societies (Hauenschild et al. 2013). In this sense, diversity refers to individual and group characteristics, which are partly innate, partly individually acquired and partly effective through laws and institutional practice like class, sex, nationality, religion, (dis)ability or age. Leiprecht (2017) points out that diversity has partly substituted terms like heterogeneity, which in the binary construction of homogeneity/heterogeneity turned out to be problematic in public discourse because heterogeneity has been mostly regarded as not ‘normal’ but a problem. Unlike heterogeneity, diversity generally has a positive connotation, and the fact that it does not have a negative antonym allows for a wide range of interpretations (Leiprecht 2017; Vertovec 2014) – which may be another explanation for its recent popularity in various disciplines. This also suggests a general difficulty to understand diversity analytically and study it empirically given inherent normativity. Riegel (2012) points out that (socially constructed) differences in a society become significant through their social implications because they mark symbolic boundaries and structure the society in a hierarchical manner. So, what is the main focus of studies looking at social diversity?

Diversity studies: Moving in ambivalent spaces

In his *Handbook for Diversity Studies*, Vertovec explains this as the study of

modes of social differentiation: how categories of difference are constructed, manifested, utilized, internalized, socially reproduced – and what kind of social, political and other implications and consequences they produce. (2014: 10)

Questions around modes of social differentiation investigate, for example, categorisations, social inequality, in-group/out-group, self-ascription and ascription by others, group and category,
symbolic and social boundaries, identity and intersectionality (Vertovec 2014). The empirical and theoretical work that diversity studies builds on refers to concepts such as race, gender, sexuality and subjects like discrimination, social inequality, status distinctions and social movements. However, Vertovec (2014) highlights that challenges arise when academics attempt to probe diversity analytically and critically whilst, at the same time, the term is used normatively or instrumentally in the public – often without clear content or overall direction. Further, diversity in the social sciences does not come with an elaborated and broadly shared theoretical framework – which holds true for educational sciences as well.

Cooper (2004) identifies a number of theoretical dilemmas and challenges with diversity that emerge at the intersection of values, collective identity and social structure. One of these is the identification of criteria that determine whether particular forms of social treatment and practice can be considered a social relation analogous to gender or class, and whether bias, prejudice or discrimination is sufficient evidence for this social relationship. Cooper (2004) argues that, in the framework of equality, it is too broad to merely look at a group’s experience of oppression given that any group that experiences oppression or discrimination – even if the group’s choices, identities or preferences are perceived as socially harmful – could present themselves as disadvantaged and call for an end to oppression. Hence, Cooper (2004) advocates differentiation between specific constituencies in terms of inequality on analytical and normative levels. This would include recognition of the relationship to dominant constituencies and discourses of normalisation (Cooper 2004). Concern for multiple forms of inequalities rooted in recognition of multiple forms of social difference needs to be negotiated in democratic societies relative to the question: ‘Which differences should be supported (because they challenge social relations of inequality and domination) and which should not?’ (Fraser 1997). Cooper (2004) argues for a more structural approach to looking at differences by evaluating the mainstream, the common
and normal as institutionalised, systemic processes through which differences arise – instead of putting groups, their practices and identities at the centre of study.

In a more general sense, Vertovec points to the opportunities of the concept of diversity, stating that it

\[\text{can help scholars think about modes of difference, their differentiated qualities, the processes that surround them and the ways that they are negotiated in social practice. (Vertovec 2014: 6)}\]

Research into diversity is confronted with a number of questions and ambiguities, namely, diversity’s boundaries and values – which and how many differences to look at, and which to neglect, and how to distinguish between differences that should be encouraged and those to be discouraged. This accompanies the question of whether to include or exclude a normative basis and, thus, delegitimise certain forms of difference. Research into diversity and diversity concepts also moves in an ambivalent space where group identities, social categorisations and differentiations are utilised and reproduced through defining, and often naturalising or essentialising, differences. What seems imperative in conceptualising diversity research is to ask ourselves how the wider normative context of the struggles for equality and diversity, power relations and normativity should be included (Cooper 2004; Leiprecht 2017; Vertovec 2014).

Like most authors, Thomas Faist (2014) discerns a difference between diversity as a management technique in organisations, and diversity that raises questions of social inequality in the sense of power struggles along the boundaries of, for example, gender, class, ethnicity, religion and age. Understanding diversity in the latter sense allows for tracing the mechanisms through which diversities or differences turn into social inequalities (Faist 2014).

Mecheril and Tißberger (2013) note that scientific interest in diversity refers to the empirical and theoretical analysis of social categorisations regarding identities and group affiliations and their interplay. Understanding the diversity of differences as constitutive
of social realities and institutional contexts, the concept of diversity enables the incorporation of gender, ethnic, cultural, generational (etc.) regimes in its concern (Mecheril and Tíssberger 2013).

**Group-centred or deconstructionist?**

Approaches that seek to understand diversity in the context of the (re)production of social inequalities and power relations can be distinguished as group-centred or deconstructionist approaches (Cooper 2004). Minorities’ attempts to secure equality of participation and power commonly centre on their shared group identity. These emancipatory and transformative approaches to diversity originating from the group-centred approach are opposed by system-centred or deconstructionist concepts of diversity that reject group recognition as the basis for their politics. They argue that emphasis on group identities and politics based on group recognition valorises false commonalities within, and creates rigid boundaries between, collectives – which ultimately limits, and does not encourage, diversity (Cooper 2004; Squires 2006). Another challenge that Cooper (2004) identifies concerning the group-centred approach encompasses that of minority groups using the language of group rights to promote disagreeable and reactionary forms of difference, for example, right-wing forces that make their entitlement claims; she also censures that group-centred approaches promote the assumption that groups are homogeneous and discrete. Hence, critique of group centredness – and taking subjective group perception of oppression and discrimination as grounds for accepting group demands as legitimate – has been expressed on the grounds that it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between radical and reactionary articulations of diversity. In this context, concerns have been raised for diversity theorists to critically reflect on the normative basis and on power asymmetries for theorising diversity (Cooper 2004).

To avoid some of these challenges, deconstructionist or system-centred approaches to diversity pursue the elimination of social classifications altogether. This again raises the question of how
deconstructing systemic factors and interrogating social structures can help to identify and address social inequalities and their effects. Focusing on social dynamics, which produce the organising principles of inequality, means to neglect the perspectives group-centred approaches offer in terms of the analysis of social inequalities and political representation, as well as the perspectives for transformation and greater equality. Cooper (2004) points to the limitations of both – the group-centred and system-centred approach – and proposes a social dynamic approach to inequality that focuses on individuals rather than groups, and where certain divisions emerge as organising principles of inequality to frame the study of diversity. By doing so, she shifts the focus from issues of group recognition to the organising principles of power, and to processes that prohibit equal participation and equip individuals with different capacities to shape the social and physical world around them. Hence, the interplay of values, collective identity and social structures, as well as their individual representation and reflection, are the focus of this approach (Cooper 2004).

Similarly, Fraser (1997) has argued that, in order to judge the value of different differences, we need to interrogate their relationship to inequality and social justice. She also points out that claims for social justice have increasingly divided themselves into two types: the first type seeks a more just distribution of resources (e.g. between the North and the South, the rich and the poor); the second type refers to the politics of recognition:

Here the goal, in its most plausible form, is a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect ... This type of claim has recently attracted the interest of political philosophers, moreover, some of whom are seeking to develop a new paradigm of justice that puts recognition at its centre. (Fraser 2009: 72)

According to Fraser, claims for redistribution and recognition are rarely conceptualised together – which she attributes to the tendency to decouple cultural politics of difference from
the social politics of equality. This, she argues, is not adequate because conceptualising justice today needs both recognition and redistribution (Fraser 2009). Combining recognition/representation and redistribution when looking at social justice and diversity is particularly relevant for this case study, which looks at the Kenyan context (see Chapter 3).

Another group-centred approach to investigating diversity in the context of social inequality refers to the construction of status:

A mere difference between people becomes a status difference when status beliefs develop that associate greater social esteem and competence with people in one category than with those from another and these beliefs become widely disseminated throughout a population. (Ridgeway et al. 2009: 44)

The status construction theory formulated by Cecilia Ridgeway (2018), building on former works on status and status construction, focuses on the development of shared beliefs about social differences that lay the basis for unequal treatment. If these beliefs, biases and prejudices based on gender, skin colour or ethnicity towards groups and individuals are widely shared, they become a status difference and consequential for social inequality (Ridgeway 2018). However, questions on how groups themselves, and the biases and prejudices attached to them, are constructed in the context of a wider notion of power relations are not the focus of status construction theory.

Thomas Faist suggests focusing on the categorisations of heterogeneities and on the social mechanisms that link the initial condition (heterogeneity or diversity) and the effect (inequalities):

Examples of social mechanisms significant for the (re-)production of inequalities are – in addition to boundary making – exclusion, opportunity-hoarding, exploitation and hierarchization … while inclusion, redistribution, de-hierarchization and ‘catching up’ constitute mechanisms which can further equality between categories of persons and groups. (Faist 2014: 266)
With these different perspectives and ambiguities in mind, Vertovec (2014) suggests a framework for researching diversity employing a deconstructionist approach that encompasses

- configurations of diversity – all structural and external conditions including policies, laws, geography that ‘enable or constrain peoples’ opportunities for action and social or physical mobility’ (Vertovec 2014: 15);
- representations of diversity – understood as social concepts, categories, discourses, hegemonic narratives that stem from and reflect power relations in a society; and
- encounters of diversity – human interactions, relations, communications, networks and conflicts.

The configurations–representations–encounters approach provides a useful theoretical framing for analysing diversity as it occurs on different levels of the Kenyan education context.

**Critique of diversity**

The concept of *diversity* has been criticised for its conceptual vagueness and for a number of other problematic connotations, found particularly in affirmative management approaches that uncritically reproduce social categories and collective identities. Diversity, as used in the public discourse and the business sector, refers to practically any category of difference – often going along with normative programmes and a celebratory rhetoric (Vertovec 2014). In an economic understanding, diversity is seen mainly as a concept that helps companies to become more productive, to tie certain social groups to their corporate identity and to become more competitive in the globalised market (Czollek et al. 2009; Steyn 2014). This largely management-related concept of diversity focuses on different social and individual identities in the context of organisations or corporations. Questions of inequality or power differences are almost absent in this notion of diversity (Vertovec 2014). Following from the explications above, other causes for
criticism of diversity include the risk of equalising differences and experiences of discrimination and oppression of various groups. It can also mask marginality and shift the attention from inequality to ‘feel-good’ measures, often referring to cultural markers alone. Another angle of criticism is that diversity potentially reinforces normativity, can be patronising and often is used merely as a formality or façade.

**Framing diversity**

These problematic connotations and warranted criticism of *diversity* call for a definition and delimitation for this particular investigation. The notion of diversity as it is used in this book frames diversity as the variety of collective identities and multiple groupings or social categorisations (e.g. ethnic, religious, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic and cultural categories) and their significance – including social practices generating and dealing with these categorisations in a given society. These practices cannot be separated from prevalent power relations and dynamics and they include discriminatory, excluding and separating, as well as inclusive, productive and cooperative ways of dealing with varieties and social categories.

**Diversity perspectives in education and school contexts**

Teaching and learning commonly take place in contexts characterised by social and cultural difference, structured along hierarchies and inequalities on various levels (Riegel 2012; Walgenbach 2017). Schools reflect this social diversity along various categories (gender, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, home languages etc.) in their students and teachers. In such settings, schools cannot be considered neutral operators or mere recipients of the social diversity conveyed to them, but as actors in the process of (re)producing, co/deconstructing differences and their meanings (Hormel & Scherr 2009; Walgenbach 2017). Attempts to conceptually grasp various differences between learners
in schools have been addressed under the term heterogeneity and, lately, diversity. Yet Riegel (2012) points out that education and schools rarely consider diversity adequately in their institutional frameworks.

The literature on diversity in education around the world reflects the increasing impact that rights-based and social movements, migration, globalisation, linguistic, religious, socio-cultural diversities as well as a diversification of lifestyles and identities have had on educational institutions (e.g. Appelbaum 2002; Banks 2015; Blommaert 2013; Clark 2020; Hauenschild et al. 2013; Ladson-Billings 1999; Leiprecht 2009; Lutz & Wenning 2001; Omodan & Ige 2021).

Historically, diversity perspectives have been put on the agenda by African–Americans, women and minority groups (particularly since the 1960s in the United States) who demanded that schools and other educational institutions reflect their experiences, cultures, histories and perspectives (Banks & Banks 2019). Influential concepts that developed from those debates are multicultural education (Banks & Banks 2019), anti-racism/anti-bias education (Derman-Sparks & Ramsey 2011; Gillborn 2006), social justice education (Adams & Bell 2016) and culturally relevant/responsive education (Ladson-Billings 2014). These include questions of appropriate teacher education and preparation for culturally diverse classrooms, as well as curriculum reform (Banks & Banks 2019; Sleeter & Cornbleth 2011).

Appelbaum (2002) regards diversity education as an enhancement of multicultural education that grew from political work in the United States in the 1960s. Since then, various critical works have informed multicultural education, including cultural studies, critical pedagogy and critical race theory. According to Appelbaum (2002), the term ‘diversity education’ reflects on these developments and refers to educational concepts that have been more fully informed by these works. Highlighting the commonalities of multicultural and diversity education, Appelbaum points out that they are:
a framework for understanding and participating in the process of schooling: to think as a multiculturalist, pluralist or diversity educator is to understand education and schooling as a social, cultural and political activity. (Appelbaum 2002: xv)

In this reading, diversity education aims to build socially just societies where diverse identities are recognised and acknowledged, cultural and social differences handled in constructive ways and equal chances and opportunities granted to all individuals.

The view of diversity education as an enhancement of intercultural and multicultural, gender, special needs and other group-centred approaches to education is shared by other authors too (Leiprecht 2009). By embracing several categories of differentiation like, for example, class, gender and disability instead of looking only at one, diversity education builds on group-centred approaches and opens them up to a wider perspective on issues of difference and discrimination in education (Leiprecht 2009).

It can be said that educational concepts that seek to address difference and (cultural) heterogeneity have, in the past decades, revealed close links to academic, social and political discourses around human rights, integration, inclusion, racism, social justice and (anti-)discrimination. Generally, they aim to accommodate the experience and identities of diverse learners in educational institutions and want to create better understanding between ‘different’ people (Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz 2010). Historically, these concepts have developed along one specific line of difference to address particular target groups of learners whose identities are marginalised, not regarded as ‘normal’ and are discriminated against on structural and institutional levels. Consequently, concepts have emerged from particular social circumstances (especially in the United States, South Africa and Europe) in close response to questions regarding social inequalities, immigration and discrimination. The contexts for a number of these discussions have been aspects of decolonisation, cultural/ethnic diversity, especially in the US since the mid-1950s, in South Africa after the
end of apartheid in 1994, and in European countries as a response to increasing migration movements. On the issue of diversity in highly fragmented societies that look for social cohesion, Banks asserts that

to create a shared civic community in which all groups participate and to which they have allegiance, steps must be taken to construct an inclusive national civic culture that balances unity and diversity. Unity without diversity results in cultural repression and hegemony. Diversity without unity leads to ethnic and cultural separatism and the fracturing of the nation state. (Banks 2015: xx)

That view expresses the debatable need for nation states to create a national identity, but not at the cost of individual and diverse cultural identities.

Since the early 1990s, efforts have been made to analytically consolidate questions relevant to particular target groups like girls/women, disabled people and marginalised cultural groups with regard to education (Hauenschild et al. 2013; Verma et al. 2007). Walgenbach (2017) distinguishes two fundamental approaches to diversity education, which have developed in the past decades and link with the different traditions and definitions of diversity mentioned above: (1) affirmative diversity and diversity-management approaches and (2) diversity approaches that focus on and critically analyse power relations. In an attempt to bring both approaches together in a common definition of diversity education, she points out that (a) diversity education aims to value social group characteristics and identities as a positive resource for educational institutions, and that (b) the educational objective of diversity education refers to the positive handling of diversity and the development of diversity competencies (Walgenbach 2017).

While affirmative diversity and diversity management approaches provide the overall framework for Walgenbach’s (2017) definition, Hormel and Scherr (2005, 2009) place the conditions and (re)productions of social inequality and discrimination between
(socially constructed) groups at the centre of their conception of
diversity education. From their analysis of the German immigration
context, they argue that under conditions of social inequality,
the central task of education and educational concepts is not to
affirm differentiations but to enable a comprehensive debate about
classifications and socially produced differentiations that serve as
justification for discriminatory treatment (Hormel & Scherr 2005,
2009). Scherr (2011) considers diversity as a critical perspective
that looks at the interconnectedness of social classifications with
socio-economic inequalities and political power relations.

Approaches and concepts seeking to address particular
educational challenges connected to discrimination, inequality,
intercultural conflict, exclusion and academic achievement of
minority groups have increasingly been discussed as diversity
education. Whether diversity as a concept for education and
educational research will develop further and prove to be useful
for research with a particular focus on education remains to
be seen. However, part of the recent success of diversity is its
openness and ability to connect to various discourses. Depending
on the paradigms and discourses that different diversity education
concepts originate from, various approaches and goals have been
followed, criticised and reworked, or have led to the development
of new concepts (cf. Gogolin & Krüger-Potratz 2010; Lutz &
Wenning 2001). Hormel and Scherr (2005) argue that in order
to make structures of social inequality and its production visible,
diversity approaches need to enable critique about generalisations,
prejudices and stereotypes; reflect the imagined borders between
groups as ambiguous and socially constructed; and enable
communication about group differentiations that should be
irrelevant. Hence, according to Hormel and Scherr (2009),
diversity education cannot be reduced to relevant aspects of political
education and social learning; it should, at the same time, aim to
overcome structural and institutional forms of discrimination. To
understand processes of discrimination on different levels, they
suggest distinguishing between discrimination as (a) an individual
practice, (b) a group practice, (c) a social practice based on cultural
attributions, (d) a legal practice based on laws and status groups, (e) an organisational practice based on specific normalities, which are organisation-specific and (f) a secondary practice based on education, social status, income and so forth (Hormel & Scherr 2009). Programmatically, they suggest using the core element of a human rights-based anti-discrimination approach, which allows for a reciprocal recognition amongst equals as the normative objective (Hormel & Scherr 2009).

While the critical analysis of and education about structures and (re)production of social inequalities and discrimination are in the focus of this approach, more affirmative concepts stress the competencies needed for dealing with diversity. From the context of affirmative intercultural and diversity education and management, various conceptual models of ‘intercultural competence’ have emerged, encompassing as a set of attitudes, skills, behaviour and knowledge supporting understanding and cooperation in culturally diverse settings (see e.g. Barrett 2011). While the often uncritically affirmative and essentialising notions of diversity and ‘different cultures’ applied in this context are problematic, specific components of what has been researched as valuable competencies and soft skills to successfully deal with social diversity can serve as a useful reference for this study. Adapted from an intercultural competence framework (Barrett 2011) for this study, the competencies to be developed in learners include:

- attitudes like valuing diversity, tolerance of ambiguity and respect for others in general;
- skills like communicative and conflict resolution skills, as well as empathy, self-reflexivity and multi-perspectivity;
- knowledge about historical, general cultural and political contexts, different perspectives and own prejudices and biases; and
- behaviours, including flexibility and adaptability and acting for the common good.

One can argue that these competencies are useful in any kind of context and society. However, when thinking about diversity
in education and particularly in schools, they remind us that it is not sufficient to teach children and young people about how diversity is constructed and used in an academic and cognitive way. The development of skills, attitudes and behaviours that will enable learners to build relations, live and cooperate with people of diverse backgrounds, and understand their own place and positionality in relation to others, will need other than purely academic approaches.

For the current debate on diversity in educational sciences, a number of concepts seem particularly influential. By drawing on the body of literature about heterogeneity, intersectionality, postcolonialism, critical diversity and critical pedagogy, the next section amplifies the theoretical lens for this investigation.

**Heterogeneity**

In school contexts, particularly in Europe, differences concerning individuals, groups or educational organisations have been widely addressed under the label of heterogeneity (different kinds) as opposed to its antonym, homogeneity (uniformity). According to various authors, heterogeneity has gained attention since the first programmes for international student assessments were carried out around the turn of the millennium, and which raised questions about the right way of dealing with heterogeneity in the school system and in class (Tillmann 2008; Walgenbach 2017). Heterogeneity focused on learners whose families had newly migrated into the education systems and who challenged some of the teaching practices and ways in which schooling was organised. Another aspect discussed referred to learners’ different achievement levels and potentials, and whether selective or inclusive education based on potential achievement levels might produce better results. Discourses about heterogeneity in education take various positions when looking at differences in school settings: some refer to it as a challenge or a chance, others focus on social inequality, yet others try to understand the differences in a descriptive way and some highlight heterogeneity as a challenge for teaching and
instruction (Walgenbach 2017). Critique has been raised, for example, that discourse on heterogeneity is oriented towards a perceived ‘normal development’ of learners with a focus on the discrepancy between this perceived normality and learners’ actual achievements and developments. This again neglects the impact of social inequality and disadvantages (Katzenbach & Börner 2016). Although the discourse on heterogeneity has developed an impact on discussions about differences in education, mainly in Europe, other concepts and perspectives have been adopted more prominently in the global context to voice the need for education to reflect on (social) differences and inequalities.

Various authors (e.g. Riegel 2012) see the need for schools to look beyond a perceived normality and problematic heterogeneity of learners in order not to take a deficit perspective on specific learners – and to look at the social structures, institutional and professional practices that produce specific disadvantages. In order to include such a diversity perspective in education and social work, intersectionality has become a powerful analytical tool.

**Intersectionality**

Developing specifically from American black feminism, intersectionality was born of the political-theoretical debates and struggles of the 1960s and 1970s in the US. First termed by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality became a tool to simultaneously analyse and reflect on the relationships between different constructions such as race, gender and class – and the social positioning that accompanies these constructions and differentiations (Collins 1998; Crenshaw 1994). Using case analyses in legal studies, Crenshaw (1989) demonstrated that discrimination laws based on single-issue frameworks like gender or race did not do justice to the experiences of discrimination of (black/white) women. Hence, intersectionality became a tool to analyse and deconstruct overlapping and intersectional experiences of discrimination and subordination by including multiple identities and their social positioning (Walgenbach
Leiprecht and Lutz (2015) emphasise that differences and social inequalities should be regarded as the result of power struggles and as discourses to legitimise oppression, exploitation and marginalisation.

Employing intersectionality as a perspective in social research therefore enables a view in which the interrelatedness and interdependency of different social categories like female and Muslim, with their modes of functioning, are brought to the centre. Intersectionality allows for research on groups formerly conceptualised as homogenous, for example, women in the US, to be seen as a heterogeneous group (white, black, lesbian, disabled, rich etc.) of women with a variety of different experiences connected to their social identities. For Yuval-Davis, intersectional analysis does not focus on specific marginalised people or ethnic minorities but is a valid approach for analysing social stratification altogether:

What is clear is that when we carry out intersectional analysis, we cannot homogenize the ways any political project or claimings affect people who are differentially located within the same boundaries of belonging. (Yuval-Davis 2016: 369)

Brah and Phoenix highlight that intersectional analyses make social positionalities such as race visible and intersecting with other categories like class, gender or sexual orientation, and show that they are ‘simultaneously subjective, structural and about social positioning and everyday practices’ (2004: 75). By including power relations and conditions of dominance that produce and legitimise specific patterns of oppression, intersectionality studies go beyond looking at social inequalities. They, rather, seek to understand structural power relations like patriarchy, sexism, racism, classism, ableism and heteronormativity in their social and historical dimension and on the macro-, meso- and micro-levels (Walgenbach 2017). Intersectionality is thus a relational framework for mapping different inequalities, and an analytical concept that helps to unveil overlapping inequalities and the power
relations associated with difference *and* space dimensions (Riegel 2016). Walgenbach (2007) distinguishes these levels as follows:

- social structures (e.g. international and gendered role divisions of labour, state regulations, private vs. public property);
- institutions (e.g. schools, family, military, churches);
- symbolic systems (e.g. representations, norms, discourses, knowledge bases, practices of recognition, symbolic violence);
- social practices (e.g. interaction, performance, distinction, physical violence); and
- subject formations (e.g. identity, processes of subjectification, subject positions, social-psychological processes).

Intersectionality has also shaped educational debates and concepts in past years, together with a focus on multiple interrelated forms of discrimination in educational settings. It serves as a tool and lens for analysis and reflection of social categorisations and their constructions and reproductions, meanings and impacts in schools and other educational contexts (Leiprecht 2017). Leiprecht (2018) points out that intersectional analysis has also become an integral part of diversity-sensitive social work, which looks into the socially produced categorisations, boundary-making and discrimination that position specific identities in the centre – and others on the margins – of society. Consequently, it has become routine to analyse processes of group constructions and their homogenisation as well as distinctions and practices of essentialising differences (Leiprecht 2018). Thus, diversity perspectives and practices in education and social work using the concept of intersectionality centre on nondiscrimination, and against oppressive structures and practices (Leiprecht 2018). They can generally be regarded as an explicitly critical approach to power and social hierarchies, aiming to change the social conditions towards social equality in consideration and recognition of diversity.

Intersectional analysis also forms part of the set of tools adopted for critical diversity literacy, a framework that has developed in the African context (see below). Besides intersectionality, this framework
embraces postcolonial studies in its conception and reflects on the African context for looking at diversity. Before elaborating on the critical diversity framework, I will introduce postcolonialism as another sensitising concept relevant to this study.

*Postcolonialism*

The interdisciplinary field of postcolonial inquiry looks at the social, cultural, economic and identity processes of colonisation and decolonisation, liberation and the global system of hegemonic power – especially after the formal end of direct-rule colonisation and imperialism (Loomba 2015; Young 2016). The three most prominent figures to have inspired debates on postcolonialism are Edward Said (Orientalism), Gayatri Spivak (the subaltern) and Homi Bhaba (hybridity) (Varela & Dhawan 2015). Said (1978) examined the discourse on Orientalism as a Western projection in which people of the Orient are constructed as a counterpoint of Europeans – as the other. This Eurocentrism came with a positioning of the self positively. Oriental language, history and culture were studied within this framework of ontological and epistemological difference and positional superiority of Europe (Said 1978). While Said’s theoretical contribution has been widely received in critical analysis of postcolonial relations, criticism has been raised that he remains stuck in the offender-victim dichotomy that does not take account of any ambiguousness or ambivalence.

In her influential essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak (1994) focuses on the subaltern, namely, people not belonging to a hegemonic class – for example, people living in rural India. She criticises well-meaning Western intellectuals for their claim that the ‘masses’ could speak for themselves, which would mask the intellectuals’ own position of power (Spivak 1994). She also points out that it is necessary to understand the logic of epistemologies in order to change them (Spvak 1994). In the context of development aid and North–South cooperation, postcolonial reflection means questioning the promise of the colonial mission to ‘civilise’ and bring a better life for everyone, and to break with the logic of
defining what a good life is in order to then participate in the ‘help-business’ (Spivak 2008; Varela 2010; Varela & Dhawan 2015).

The concept of hybridity, which originally meant a cross or a mixture (e.g. between different plants or cultures), has become prominent in the postcolonial discourse through Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and others. Towards the end of the 18th century, hybridity formed the basis of a fearful discourse for mixing races. Later, in postcolonial discourse, hybridity has served to study the effects of mixing on culture and identity (Loomba 2015). Bhabha (2004) theoretically transformed the term hybridity into an active element of resistance against colonialism. According to her, hybridity posts a problem to colonial representation because it reverses the effects of colonial contempt in a way that makes space for the rejected other’s knowledge to be included in the foundations of authority, dominance and oppression – and makes the presence of the colonial authority not immediately recognisable (Bhabha 2004). However, the concept of hybridity in postcolonial studies has been criticised for being linked to racist discourses in negative ways.

Loomba points out that colonialism took place in various types and forms and therefore colonial histories were experienced in many different ways, which also explains why postcolonialism carries different meanings around the world:

We certainly cannot dismiss the critique that … ‘postcolonialism’ has become so heterogeneous and diffuse that it is impossible to satisfactorily describe what its study might entail. (2015: 5)

Varela and Dhawan (2015) suggest that postcolonial theory can be understood as the study of resistance to, and consequences of, colonisation that also interrogates processes of continuing decolonisation and re-colonisation – including the production of epistemic violence. Both Loomba (2015) and Varela and Dhawan (2015) highlight that colonialism and postcolonialism should not be seen as a linear process in which postcolonialism means after colonialism. This would not do justice to the complex and
conflicting processes and consequences of colonisation and new forms of accessing and exploiting the resources of former colonies.

Hauck (2012) summarises the three central convictions of the postcolonial discourse as being (1) anti-essentialist, and including the notion of hybridity of all cultural and social formations, (2) anti-Eurocentric, including the notion of a reciprocal constitution of the self and the other and (3) anti-colonial, including a firm conviction of the interdependency of modernisation/economic development on one side, and colonial/postcolonial stagnation on the other side.

While the concern of postcolonialism lies mainly with questions of racialised oppression and constructions of the other in postcolonial or migration settings, education as such is not in the prime focus of this debate. However, education is a central area for strategies of decolonialisation and ways to practically address structures and implications of postcolonialism. Unlike postcolonialism, the concept of intersectionality does not focus on one category such as ethnicity/race; it has widened the perspective by including the various social relations and their underlying processes of power, dominance and normalisation that are being discussed intensively with regard to educational contexts.

Varela (2010) points out that linking diversity with postcolonialism is not a self-explanatory endeavour. However, discussions on postcolonial approaches around redistribution, recognition and transformation intersect with debates taking place in critical diversity (Varela 2010). To analyse diversity approaches through a postcolonial lens, Varela (2010) suggests distinguishing between intention, method and outcome. In this sense, intention would aim at transformation in terms of decolonisation and therefore set a normative target; method would include consideration of various forms and experiences of discrimination and their dynamics, taking seriously the problem of essentialising identities; outcome would refer to a movement towards social justice and thinking on, and keeping alive the idea of a political utopia of social change (Varela 2010):
In a critical version, diversity can be understood as a strategy guided by utopia which entails ethical thoughts of recognition and equality. (Varela 2010: 251, own translation)

When looking at diversity with a postcolonial lens, Varela (2010) argues that it would not be sufficient to only focus on power asymmetries. To enable change, we also need to include the thinking and imagination of different futures. Thus, the overall objective could be seen as democratisation of the society, which builds on recognition and respect of the other.

Utilising postcolonialism as a sensitising concept for this study requires conscious reflection of ongoing struggles for decolonisation in contemporary Kenya. Taking into account the historical interconnectedness of colonisation and formal education, existing notions of diversity in education should be linked to questions about the colonial heritage, in which education served as a means to devalue and alienate people from local environments (Fanon 1967; Freire 1996). This view interrogates power and knowledge, representation and educational norms and standards as well as Eurocentric and essentialising discourses (including the logic of epistemologies) as a basis to enable change.

An approach that attempted to integrate the different theoretical considerations mentioned above into a contextualised study of diversity in the African context is that of critical diversity.

**Critical diversity**

Drawing on intersectionality, critical race theory and postcolonial studies, the critical diversity approach was developed in South Africa by Melissa Steyn; amongst others, the approach focuses on multiple axes of difference where power dynamics operate to create the centres and margins of gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, age etc. as well as their varying intersections. It also acknowledges the centuries of colonial history and
ideologies of Western/European (white) superiority and African/Asian (black) inferiority. (Steyn 2014: 381)

Hence, the dynamic social locations in which people are positioned based on their identities, group affiliations and power relations in place, are central to this approach.

A critical approach to diversity names the ideological systems put in place by and for these positionalities as well as the hegemonic discourses that reproduce them, such as whiteness, heteronormativity, patriarchy, eurocentrism etc. (Steyn 2014: 382)

Steyn (2014) also points to the subjective positions in relationships of privilege and power, which mean that not all white heterosexual males will benefit the same from the privileges afforded to whiteness, maleness and heteronormativity. While acknowledging hegemonic discourses and power structures as organising principles for social relations, she also refers to the space for subjectivities and the possibility of inconsistencies or contradictions when looking at individuals (Steyn 2014).

From this approach, Steyn (2014) developed a framework called critical diversity literacy, which includes the analytical cornerstones of a diversity programme in sociology at university level. Although it is framed as a literacy programme for sociology students, these cornerstones of skills and competencies provide insights to how diversity can be unpacked in various settings, and particularly in contexts with a history of colonisation and racialisation. Steyn (2014) explicates the critical diversity approach in the following ten points, which may not be exhaustive but can be refined according to different contexts. Critical diversity includes:

1. an understanding of the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference;
2. a recognition of the unequal symbolic and material value of different social locations. This includes acknowledging hegemonic
DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

positionalities and concomitant identities (e.g. white-ness, heterosexuality, masculinity, cisgender, able-bodiedness, middle-classness etc.), and how these dominant orders position those in nonhegemonic spaces;

3. the ability to unpack how these systems of oppression intersect, interlock, co-construct and constitute each other, and how they are reproduced, resisted and reframed;

4. a definition of oppressive systems such as racism and (post) colonialism as current social problems and (not only) a historical legacy;

5. an understanding that social identities are learned and are an outcome of social practice;

6. the possession of a diversity grammar and vocabulary that facilitate a discussion of privilege and oppression;

7. the ability to ‘translate’ (see through) and interpret coded hegemonic practices;

8. an analysis of the ways that diversity hierarchies and institutionalised oppressions are influenced through specific social contexts and material arrangements;

9. an understanding of the role of emotions, including our own emotional investment, in all of the above; and

10. an engagement with issues of the transformation of these oppressive systems towards deepening social justice at all levels of social organisation (Steyn 2014).

By including transformation and social justice on various levels (as in list item ten above), the critical paradigm employed in this framework facilitates a perspective that goes beyond understanding and unpacking diversity. Instead, it facilitates connections to educational sciences and approaches that similarly locate themselves in a critical paradigm and aim to transform and change social relations towards equality. This includes, among others, social justice education, anti-racism, anti-bias and decolonising education, as well as multicultural and culturally responsive education, which a critical diversity education can draw on. Looking into these approaches that have developed from
various particular contexts goes beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will introduce critical pedagogy as the lens for this study because, centrally, it looks at power relations and social inequality and can serve as a broad framework for the notion of diversity in education as understood in the study.

**Critical pedagogy**

Based on a vision of social and educational justice and equality, critical pedagogy is grounded in the belief that education is inherently political (Kincheloe 2008). Critical pedagogy is therefore concerned with the ways in which relations of power and inequality are manifest or challenged in schools (Apple & Au 2009). Grounded in critical theory, critical pedagogy was first mentioned in Henri Giroux’s *Theory and Resistance in Education*, which was published in 1983. Prominent scholars like Paulo Freire (1973, 1996), Michael Apple (1998, 1999; Apple et al. 2009), Peter McLaren (McLaren & Kincheloe 2007), bell hooks (1994) and many others have contributed to the theory and practice of critical pedagogy, challenging educational debates about democratic schooling, teacher education and social change. Critical pedagogy draws on former progressive philosophical and educational movements concerned with advancing democratic ideals around the turn of the 19th and into the 20th century. Peter McLaren and Henri Giroux highlight the influence of the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (who worked extensively on the purpose of education in democratic societies) on critical pedagogy (Giroux et al. 1989).

In critical pedagogy, education is seen in its systemic context, appreciating the relationship between schooling and other social dynamics (Giroux et al. 1989). Critical education is particularly interested in the margins of society – in the experiences and needs of individuals faced with oppression and marginalisation, and in the transformation of oppressive power relations in various domains. To understand the forms and processes of power relations that produce oppressive conditions, Apple and Au (2009) point to the
need for us to reposition ourselves in order to see through the
eyes of marginalised and dispossessed people. They also highlight
the need to understand so-called neoconservative and neoliberal
policies and their belief in the value of social hierarchy and a
meritocratic society that reproduces social inequalities through its
education policies and systems (Apple & Au 2009).

Martusewicz et al. (2011), in their approach to ecojustice
education, call attention to how value-hierarchised thinking
grounded in the dominant value systems of modern thought
has informed schools in past decades. Specific modernist
discourses of progress, efficiency, usefulness, industrial or
technological development and so forth, create a belief system
and value hierarchies that are presented as natural and normal,
and which endow some people and positions with more power
than others. In this way, racism, sexism, ableism, ethnocentrism
and other oppressive ways of thinking and knowing form part
of the discourses that create value hierarchies of superiority and
dominance (Lowenstein et al. 2010).

To clarify critical pedagogy’s orientation towards social justice,
Apple and Au (2009) refer to Nancy Fraser (1997) to show that
issues around the politics of redistribution and the politics of
recognition need to be jointly considered. Both types of social
justice – the redistributive (economic) claims and the claims for
the politics of recognition (cultural and identity struggles against
domination) – form the normative basis for critical pedagogy
(Fraser 2009).

Even though it merely serves as a very broad orientation, which
offers multiple forms and ways in which schooling, education
policy, teacher education and curriculum can be described and
looked at, critical pedagogy can serve as a general theoretical
perspective to look at diversity in Kenyan school contexts. The
notion of diversity proposed by this perspective links to the
abovementioned concept of intersectionality as an analytical tool
to deconstruct multiple forms of categorisation and discrimination
within specific power relations. Postcolonialism with its central
notion of othering will furthermore provide a powerful tool to
look at diversity in the East African context with its history of colonisation and racialisation.

In critical pedagogy, teaching and learning in schools is not neutral and cannot be separated from questions of democracy and justice (Kincheloe 2004). Critical educators, therefore, reflect on the institutional practices and policies of schooling that lead to specific categorisations, restrictions and punishments and restrain or exclude students who do not fit the proper demographic (Kincheloe 2004). In that way, all decisions made in the school become political and need to be questioned as to which groups of students and identities are privileged over others. In the classroom critical educators engage in co-constructing knowledge and meaning with their students/learners, aiming to build a critical consciousness of who they are in relation to the social world surrounding them and to mitigate the effects of power on them.

In this idealised vision the teachers acknowledge their own social positions and political agendas and direct all their practices towards the empowerment of learners to become highly skilled democratic citizens who are able to improve their own lives and social environments (Ellsworth 1989; Kincheloe 2004). However, in reality, teachers are implicated in reproducing social power relations in schools, and education itself has been described by critical educationist as a process between the conflicting poles of subordination and liberation (Ellsworth 1989; Riegel 2016). Nevertheless, critical educators point out that we need to be able to articulate that transformative, just and egalitarian vision of critical pedagogy in which learners are experts in their own interest areas and inspired to use education to do good things in the world (Kincheloe 2004).

Within a critical pedagogy framework, the focus on diversity in school contexts provides an orientation towards social justice and asks how the operating systems of power and domination (patriarchy, sexism, classism, ableism etc.) hold marginalised positionalities for specific identities, while privileging others at the same time. The kind of consequences this holds for the teachers, who move between the reproduction of dominant conditions on
one side and transformation on the other side, will be discussed in the following section.

**Teachers and diversity**

A number of education scholars have identified the need to include diversity issues in teacher education, given that teachers need to be prepared to deal with diversity matters in their professional practice. Mecheril and Vorrink (2012) suggest a reflexive diversity practice by teachers and educators that

- reflects on the status positions, opportunities and resources of the actors (participants and educators) with regard to chances to shape their future life;
- asks for conditions under which an affirmative diversity approach can serve to decrease distorted power relations; and
- constantly asks questions about the effects of fixing individuals to certain differences, about differences that are not spoken about and about who benefits from the applied readings of diversity.

Hormel and Scherr (2005) argue that diversity education approaches should target comprehensive engagements with classifications that contain messages of inferiority, or can be used to justify discrimination. In this context, diversity education needs to

- make transparent, structures and processes that lead to the construction of socially unequal groups;
- enable criticism on illegitimate generalisations, stereotypes and prejudice – and sensitise that people are individuals;
- clarify that group affiliations do not establish borders between different types of people but that there are commonalities, which put the differences into perspective; and
- facilitate exposure to communication and cooperation in which group differences can be experienced as irrelevant (Hormel & Scherr 2005; Walgenbach 2017).
In interpreting these key elements of a diversity-conscious education practice in a critical pedagogy framework, the focus will be on the power relations and social mechanisms that produce categorisations, and their effects on (re)producing social hierarchies. Some authors use a combination of affirmative and power critical diversity approaches to provide suggestions in terms of competencies that teachers require in order to deal with diversity in a positive way (Rosken 2009; Schröer 2012). These include the ability to change perspectives, deal with ambivalences, analyse differences and commonalities, deal with feelings of foreignness as well as reflexivity of one’s own values, biases and practices (Rosken 2009).

Looking at diversity in terms of institutional practices, Leiprecht (2009) highlights that diversity approaches enable a change of perspective whereby, for example, it is not learners who do not speak the language of instruction well who are the problem; the problem is institutions (schools) that do not meet the needs of those learners (Leiprecht 2009). Hormel and Scherr (2005) point to the following institutional learning challenges emanating from the diversity perspective:

- Schools as organisations are to ask if and how the learners’ and teachers’ experiences enable or constrain the handling of diversity.
- Processes of classroom interaction and cooperation need to be put in place to see who interacts with whom and where demarcations take place.
- Schools need to include diversity in the curriculum.
- The attitudes, self-image and convictions of educators, and the requirements to enable a reflected and nondiscriminatory professional practice with respect to diversity, need to be promoted.

Although theoretical deliberations and empirical studies have produced knowledge about how schools and teacher education do, and ought to, respond to growing diversities, education
DIVERSITY IN EDUCATION

policy, curricula and institutional frameworks have not embraced these ideas. Diversity is rarely considered in the institutional frameworks of schools – nor are diversity perspectives in teacher education (Riegel 2016).

Implications for researching diversity in schools

For most teachers around the world, a thorough exposure to issues, skills and practices concerning diversity is largely missing, particularly those approaches that go beyond celebrating different cultural backgrounds. This does not imply, however, that policies and – in some contexts – institutional guidelines pertaining to diversity and nondiscrimination are non-existent. Nevertheless, in contexts where binding diversity policies and stringent implementation are missing and neither institutional frameworks, nor curricula and teacher education have thoroughly included diversity in their concern, teachers are left to embark on various practices, including ‘blind-eye’ or assimilationist strategies. This raises the question: ‘In what way would research into teachers’ professional practices concerning diversity in the Kenyan context be useful, given that relevant benchmarks (national, regional, institutional) are largely lacking?'

For the purpose of the present study, I have chosen to include the teachers’ biographical experiences and perceptions as a resource that all teachers bring to the classroom. Parker Palmer formulated the concept of good teaching arising from the identity and integrity of the teacher, where techniques merely offer support:

"Face to face with my students, only one resource is at my immediate command: my identity, my selfhood, my sense of the ‘I’ who teaches. (Palmer 1997: 10)"

Palmer (1997) defines identity as a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make the individual who they are. Individual traits and features, as well as social and cultural positioning and lived experiences, constitute a particular identity, which is not to
be separated from the professional identity of the teacher. When researching diversity in school contexts (which is largely about identity and socially constructed categorisations that make a difference in the particular context – see above), it seems useful to take into account the identities of the teachers that are brought to the classroom. In past decades, a number of qualitative studies have taken an approach that looks into teachers’ biographies and identities to research diversity and multiculturalism in the context of teaching (Everington et al. 2011; Herrera 2016; Osler 1997; Skerrett 2008a, 2008b; Vavrus 2006). These studies identified a relationship between individual teachers’ biographies, and how the teachers perceived and responded to various aspects of diversity in the classroom.

These insights seem significant and they suggest that if we want to understand diversity in Kenyan schools from the teachers’ perspective, we need to consider the teachers’ own identities, with their lived experiences and perceptions concerning diversity. These biographical experiences offer insights to configurations, representations and encounters of diversity, and the teachers’ perceptions will help understand the meaning constructed from these experiences in terms of the beliefs and mental images the teachers hold regarding diversity, which, in turn, influence their professional practice.

The methodological implications for embarking on this research in a critical interpretivist paradigm using the theoretical avenues presented above as a lens, will be explained in more detail after looking at the Kenyan education context and identifying the research gap.

**Conceptual framework**

Instead of proposing a fixed conceptual framework, the inquiry for this study draws on sensitising concepts related to the power relations and social mechanisms that construct differences for the purpose of legitimising and manifesting discrimination and social inequalities. Educational theories and concepts developed
in the past acknowledge that schools and education are not neutral players, but actively participate in the reproduction and manifestation of social differences leading to social inequalities. How schools as institutions, their curricula, instruction and education policies need to change in order to embrace social diversity and create conditions where diverse social groups and identities have equal chances to succeed, has been the concern of (critical) diversity studies in the field of education. Many authors have also argued that diversity education is tasked to raise critical consciousness of the social mechanisms and normalising and essentialising discourses that position certain identities in the centre and others in the margins of society. However, studying diversity holds dilemmas and ambivalences arising from the multiplicity of social differences intersecting in each individual on one hand (deconstructionist/system-centred approaches), and the danger of reproducing social categorisations, naturalising and essentialising differences when studying particular social groups on the other (group-centred approaches). Recognising that national school systems privilege some social groups – in their dynamic spaces and with their intersecting lines of differences within individuals – over others, requires a combination of both approaches. The sensitising concepts of intersectionality and postcolonialism were introduced to put diversity in the Kenyan school context into a perspective that looks critically at simultaneous inequalities and takes into account the more general power relations and discourses that produce these inequalities. This seems necessary because, generally, diversity continues to be examined in fragmented ways by looking at issues separately (cf. Valentín 2006).

As a framework for studying diversity in Kenyan school contexts that brings together the relevant sensitising concepts, I introduced critical pedagogy with its vision of social and educational justice through recognition and redistribution.

Intersectionality provides a sensitising perspective in that it enables an understanding of different social categories that interrelate and intersect to create meaning in a particular context. On one hand, it sensitises us to the variety of different categorisations
that go beyond the race-class-gender triad. On the other hand, it promotes conscious reflection on the interconnectedness and fluidity of the different social categories that intersect to create meanings for individuals. The central dimension in understanding diversity through intersectionality and critical pedagogy is the power relations in specific sociopolitical and cultural contexts, which simultaneously generate different inequalities. Since the geographic location of the study is Kenya, the sensitising concept of postcolonialism promotes interpretive angles that take into account its history of oppression and its struggle against it. Critical diversity becomes part of a larger effort to dismantle and change social and value hierarchies rooted in colonial structures and continuities of oppressive global power relations and hierarchies. This also speaks to the distinction between intention, method and outcome when researching diversity in postcolonial contexts that Varela (2010) suggests. The intention sets the goal of social justice and decolonisation, the method looks at different forms of discrimination and includes criticism of essentialising identities, the outcomes include strategies and practices – in this case of the teachers and schools – towards social justice.

This lens allows the teachers to be viewed as actors in the conflicting space of reproducing difference and inequity, and deconstructing and/or transforming difference towards more equity. To attain an understanding of the configurations, representations and encounters of diversity in the Kenyan school context, I will include the biographical experiences and identities of teachers. I view these experiences and identities as a resource at the teachers’ command to respond to diversity in their professional practice – independently of whether teacher education programmes and institutional frameworks address diversity issues in a particular context.