Positioning Diversity in Kenyan Schools

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Based on the diversity categories that emerged from the teachers’ biographies and professional experiences, the next level of analysis and theory development includes the integration and discussion of these findings following the coding paradigm as an organising scheme (see Figure 9) suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998). It distinguishes between the (a) general context, (b) causal factors, (c) intervening conditions, (d) action/interactional strategies and (e) the consequences (Babchuk 1996; Charmaz 2006; Mey & Mruck 2011: 40; Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Referring to Vertovec’s (2014) conceptual distinction between configurations, representations and encounters of diversity, the context in this organising scheme refers to the configurations of diversity and hence, its structural conditions. For this case, the context includes the regional setting (i.e. Kenya with its history of colonialism and struggle against oppression and domination) and Kenyan formal schools as sites of the study.

The causal factors delineate the representations of diversity (i.e. the social concepts and categories, hegemonic narratives and discourses that stem from the power relations in society); they
explain the phenomenon in the given context. They are derived from the data as the most relevant categories that contributed to the way in which diversity in Kenyan school contexts was experienced and perceived by the teachers. They also provide an understanding of the demarcations and boundaries of the teachers’ strategies and practices to deal with the phenomenon.

The most relevant *intervening conditions* that affected the strategies of the teachers when responding to the phenomenon were conceptualised as the identities of the teachers in terms of their own biographies and experiences with diversity. Together with the teachers’ professional practices and strategies, the lived experiences of the teachers draw attention to the third component, the *encounters* of diversity (i.e. human interactions and relationships).
Looking through the lens of critical pedagogy and its vision of social justice, I distinguish between two types of strategies or professional practices that respond to the phenomenon: Type A comprises strategies that perpetuate the status quo or manifest differences and inequality, and Type B comprises strategies that lead to social justice and are more inclusive. These feed into the consequences. Thus, this study aims to contribute knowledge about strategies (teachers’ professional practices regarding diversity in education in the Kenyan context) that can address the causal factors (the drivers of social inequality).

The consequences refer to the anticipated or actual outcomes of the actions/interactions; they highlight the teachers’ practices concerning the phenomenon, including communications, conflicts and relations resulting from them.

The chapter is laid out as follows: first, the central phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation catalysed from the teachers’ accounts is explained and discussed. Then, the specific context, followed by discussion of the causal factors and the ways in which they contribute to the phenomenon are in focus. After that, the intervening conditions (i.e. the teachers’ biographical experiences and identities and the ways in which these affect the phenomenon) are discussed. Last, strategies to deal with diversity are interrogated in context of the consequences – in particular, which might contribute to hierarchisation and inequalities, and which could lead to de-hierarchisation, more inclusive structures and equality.

By dividing the strategies and practices into those leading to more hierarchisation (or sustaining the status quo) and those leading to less hierarchisation, I aim to extract diversity education approaches that could attenuate hierarchies and lead to more social cohesion, nondiscrimination and equality, as envisaged by the Kenyan Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya 2013, see Chapter 3).

An overview of the new knowledge gained and theoretical contribution of this study concludes the chapter.
Diversity as imposed hierarchisation

Diversity in the Kenyan school context can be described as a matter of imposed hierarchisation. Social hierarchies are not experienced as distinct and effective through the teachers themselves, but through a larger social order and categorisation system that the teachers experience as imposed on them by society and the way in which schooling is organised. Diversity in the context of hierarchisation therefore, implies practices of discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, taboos and stigma along these vertically organised lines of difference.

The teachers revealed high levels of consciousness of the fact that particular features of identities would generally delimit or extend the opportunities awarded to individuals in the Kenyan nation state and consequently confer positionalities in the social hierarchy. Hence, the hierarchisation connected to social diversity was generally perceived and experienced as a problem, while diversity itself and the fact that Kenyan society is constitutionally intended to be pluralistic (with regard to ethnicity, culture, religion, etc.) raised questions (e.g. concerning teaching and institutional policies) but was not perceived as problematic per se.

It is remarkable that the teachers’ perceptions were grounded in what Melissa Steyn (2014) calls ‘critical diversity literacy’ – recognising the unequal symbolic and material value of different social positions, and the role of power in constructing differences that make a difference in a particular society. The un-essentialising notion of diversity revealed by the teachers opened a critical perspective into the ways in which differences are used to create boundaries and assign positions in the hierarchical society.

This largely confirms Faist’s (2014) conceptualisation of hierarchisation: the social mechanisms that link an initial condition (in this case, social diversity) to the (re)production of social inequalities (see Chapter 2). Faist refers to the symbolic borders and social differentiations that serve as basis for legitimising unequal treatment and distribution of power in the face of
multiple differences (i.e. diversity). In this sense, hierarchisation is immensely problematic with regard to social justice and human rights concerns.

More generally, hierarchies can be regarded as systems – especially in a society or organisation in which people, ideas, or values are organised into different levels of importance from highest to lowest. These ordering systems can be based on formal categorisations (e.g. citizenship status) that regulate access to specific state services like employment, health, education and housing and thereby exclude some categories of people from particular services (and prefer others). In a society marked by severe social inequalities, as in Kenya, defining groups in need of special state support and protection can be a tool to foster social equality and justice – although such formal differentiation and definition of groups can still have problematic effects and create new injustices. Despite the dismantling of old hierarchies and the strong move for equality and equal rights in many contemporary societies, hierarchies have not disappeared (Angle et al. 2017). Stephen Angle et al. (2017) argue that clear thinking about hierarchies and equality is needed in order to distinguish between hierarchies that serve democracy and equality (e.g. certain bureaucratic hierarchies in constitutional institutions, and the power of elected decision-makers or professionals based on domain-specific expertise) and those that are reduced to domination and power over others. In this argument, inequalities and status differences can be acceptable provided they allow for change over time (e.g. do not lead to unjustified accumulation and passing on of power) and are embedded in relationships of mutual concern and reciprocity (Angle et al. 2017).

This uncritical notion of social hierarchies (based on formal categorisations by state law and the belief in expertism and meritocracy) veils and manifests the interests of the powerful and thus, is not in the centre of interest of a critical paradigm. Rather, processes of hierarchisation based on socially constructed differences need to be questioned with regard to the underlying values that define the centres and margins of a society. Therefore, the
discussion in this section will not focus on philosophical questions about legitimate hierarchies and their usefulness in democratic societies to foster equality. The phenomenon of hierarchisation to be explained for the Kenyan school context looks at the symbolic borders and diversities that hold consequences for individuals and groups with regard to their educational success and the (re)production of social inequality. In order to reflect on the critical constructivist framing of this study and focus on spaces for action (teaching practices) and change, the central phenomenon of hierarchisation (as opposed to hierarchies) directs attention to the social mechanisms of constructing, reproducing, minimising and equalising hierarchised ordering systems. At school level, hierarchies grade specific abilities, languages and sociocultural backgrounds, subject fields, ways of thinking, knowing, teaching and testing as useful and therefore high – and others as useless and therefore low. In the next section, the observed phenomenon of this study is explained in its specificity by looking at the causal factors identified as drivers of experienced imposed hierarchisation.

**Devaluation of local knowledges and resources**

The specific site and context for this study, namely schools in postcolonial Kenya with their structural and geographical conditions, are central to this section. Figure 10 illustrates the configurations (context) and representations (causal factors) of the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation.

The major structural factor affecting the Kenyan schools in terms of the configurations of diversity is the centre-periphery disparity. This disparity comprises the different localities and positionalities of schools in urban (centre) and rural (periphery) areas. The centre-periphery model, which was originally used as a metaphor in the fields of political geography and development theory (Galtung 1972; Selwyn 1979), has been applied to other disciplines to describe the structural relationship between the advanced or industrialised centre and the less developed periphery. The disparity between schools in urban and rural settings,
central or marginalised regions, emerged from the data as a key factor in creating various hierarchies that influence educational opportunities in the centralised Kenyan education system. As also indicated by, for example, Unesco’s World Inequality Database on Education (see Chapter 3), vast disparities exist between rural and urban areas concerning access to, and success in, education in Kenya. The teachers’ perspective on schooling in rural or peripheral regions highlighted that the discrepancy between local resources (in terms of languages, beliefs and knowledges) and the official curriculum and languages of instruction led to a situation where the learners – and partly the teachers themselves – could barely connect to the teaching content and often rejected it completely. When excluding the resources and values that people possessed and that were grounded in their specific contexts, the teachers experienced strong feelings of nonacceptance – they performed the role of ‘the centre’, declaring the values, knowledge and practices of the ‘periphery’ worthless and replacing them
with other languages, content and teaching methods considered valuable and useful. Thus, the hierarchisation of different types of knowledge and education became a diversity issue that the teachers experienced as a conflict – particularly because they did not agree with some of the cultural and religious practices of the communities in which they were working; but at the same time, they realised that the centres of knowledge and education they represented would serve little useful purpose for those learners and local people. This speaks to what Catherine Odora Hoppers (2000) explored with regard to knowledge production and scholarship in global North–South contexts, and Brigit Brock-Utne (2002) with regard to education and languages of instruction, asking: Whose knowledge? Whose education? In a broader sense, these issues are linked to questions of power concerning the struggle for recognition of multiple epistemologies and knowledges, and for decolonising education (Hall & Tandon 2017; Odora Hoppers & Richards 2012). From the data produced in this study, the predefined hierarchisation of knowledge, languages, cultural values, and so forth, became obvious in the discrepancy between the centre (where the knowledge, languages of instruction and the cultural values transmitted through formal education seemed appropriate) and the periphery (where, in many ways, this was not the case). This is why the teachers working in peripheral regions of Kenya experienced the structural relationship between the standard model of formal education they represented and the local knowledge and sociocultural practices as an imposed social hierarchisation. One of the main factors the teachers highlighted to account for the exclusion of learners in marginalised areas from equal opportunities to compete in the formal education system was the language of instruction used in formal education and assessment.

The teachers’ accounts indicate the ways in which colonial continuities still exist. The inherited models of othering and ‘civilising’ people are being perpetuated by constructing language and knowledge as universal and standard to people whose lived experiences, languages, beliefs and practices appear as culturally or
racially inferior (Alexander 2000). In current literature on diversity in education or diversity education concepts, this centre-periphery aspect has not been in focus. One reason might be that in Kenya (as in many African states), geographic conditions including the provision of infrastructure are disparate and, consequently, living conditions differ widely; this is not the case to such extremes in Europe. Another reason could be that this structural dimension of power relations can’t be counteracted or substantially transformed by individual schools or the teachers themselves. Rather, it calls for policymakers to change educational frameworks towards decentralised, multiple systems in terms of curricula, languages of instruction and schooling. However, the data analysed in this study reveal a number of structures and practices that render the centre-periphery disparity influential on education in the Kenyan nation state, on teachers’ professional practices and on the need to manage a vast disparity in the conditions under which formal education takes place.

The drivers of fragmentation and inequality

The following specific drivers or causal factors that explain how hierarchisation is enacted, perpetuated and reproduced, explain the representations of diversity in the Kenyan school context:

- tribalism as political exploitation and instrumentalisation of ethnicity connected to rivalries and conflicts centred on the distribution of power (political, economic, cultural) and resources;
- body-related norms and values (including a binary gender concept and heteronormativity as social and institutionalised drivers of discrimination with regard to diverse sexual orientations and gender identities) as well as health-related issues (including ableism and HIV/Aids);
- socio-economic disparities including extreme ends of affluence and poverty; and
- gender relations that include specific sociocultural roles, divisions of labour and stereotypes.
A GROUNDED THEORY OF DIVERSITY IN KENYAN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

These aspects were identified as factors that explain why diversity in Kenyan schools was experienced as an imposed social hierarchisation that teachers are confronted with, and have to respond to, in their professional practice. In the following sub-sections, anchoring examples from the data are discussed in relation to the literature in order to explain the phenomenon further.

**Tribalism**

The prevalence of tribalism as the political instrumentalisation of ethnic diversity in Kenya’s sociopolitical context was portrayed in Chapter 3. Since colonial times, divide-and-rule practices with their separating, essentialising and othering strategies have been geared towards creating rivalries and establishing fixed social hierarchies in former colonies. Teachers, particularly in mixed schools, referred to these boundaries, rivalries and hierarchies based on ethnic group affiliation as infusing social relations into schools – leading to perception and experience of ethnic diversity as an imposed hierarchisation. The post-election violence of 2007/2008 (when conflict broke out openly along ethnic lines) left many teachers traumatised and conscious of the danger that this could happen again, even a decade later. The teachers referred to some positive effects of ethnic diversity, and also highlighted the fact that ethnic diversity in Kenya couldn’t be separated from tribalism and its inherent social hierarchisation. With reference to studying diversity from the angles of redistribution on one hand and recognition on the other (Fraser 2009), tribalism shows both variations. The open conflict between powerful ethnic groups that are large in number tends to focus on distributional and political power issues; the smaller ethnic groups tend to struggle for recognition of their identity. The teachers highlighted their positionality within experienced boundaries in the ethnicised social hierarchy that they felt were imposed on them by the country’s elite.

Ethnicity and race play a major role in the international literature on diversity (in) education because racism and ethnocentrism are powerful ideological systems, reproduced by dominant discourses
around the world (Hauenschild et al. 2013; Ladson-Billings 2014; Leiprecht & Lutz 2015; Nderitu 2018a; Phoenix 2008). To understand tribalism as a specific peculiarity of the social category, race, and as a major causal factor in social hierarchisation in the Kenyan context, the postcolonial lens is appropriate to interrogate the roots of these harmful and discriminatory practices. For the teachers, tribalism emerged as a powerful causal factor for experiencing ethnic diversity as an imposed social hierarchisation in schools. In the light of the continuing threat of new violent conflicts along ethnic lines, tribalism and ethnic diversity are of major concern in the current educational debate with regard to diversity and social cohesion in Kenya (Nderitu 2018a).

**Body-related norms and values**

Another causal factor explaining how diversity in Kenyan schools is perceived and experienced by teachers as imposed social hierarchisation, concerns body-related norms and values. Examples include ability-disability, heterosexuality-homosexuality as well as HIV and Aids (as a chronic disease with specific sexual connotations). The teachers reflected on the implicit and underlying norms and values of the curriculum and the teaching methods, which neither sufficiently differentiate between fast and slow learners, nor cater for learners with disabilities. In often overcrowded classrooms, teachers cater for those who fit the perceived norm while observing the failure of those who do not. This socially imposed hierarchisation is transmitted mainly through the curriculum, non-accommodating institutional frameworks and inadequate teaching resources and methods. Since teachers’ resources to provide extra support to learners with special needs are extremely limited, their ability to push towards inclusive teaching is too (Chege & Nekesa 2018; Rushahu 2017). This means that even if their individual pedagogical practice as teachers is not discriminatory, the organisational structures are and the teachers – often consciously yet unwillingly – end up reproducing these structures (Hormel & Scherr 2005). Another dimension
that relates to learners with special needs concerns cultural beliefs
and stigma, which the teachers experienced as a main obstacle for
equal participation in school. Physically disabled children are often
hidden in the home so teachers experience challenges in finding
ways to accommodate learners with disabilities in the schools and
overcoming stigma in the communities.

Social stigma and related taboos were similarly identified as major
causal factors leading to experiences of imposed hierarchisation
concerning HIV and Aids and homosexuality. Much has been
written and researched with regard to the stigma attached to HIV
and Aids, particularly in many African societies (Holzemer et al.
2007; Mbonu et al. 2009). The strong social taboo surrounding
homosexuality in Kenya, which reveals the powerful hegemonic
discourse that produces heteronormativity, was discussed in
Chapter 2. From the teachers’ perceptions and experiences, the
status of HIV-positive learners and teachers needs to be hidden
and not talked about in order to protect infected persons from
stigmatisation, exclusion and even aggression and violence.
Similarly, teaching comprehensive sexuality education in a critical
pedagogy framework that foregrounds social justice and human
rights would, in the teachers’ views, literally be dangerous due to
the powerful cultural and religious beliefs in the communities.
The socioculturally grounded value hierarchy concerning the body
and sexuality norms revealed strict boundaries for the teachers to
embrace diversity. Taboos (as the most powerful tool to protect
these hegemonic discourses and thus, the hierarchy) prohibit any
speaking about sexual orientation outside heterosexuality (Douglas
2002). However, some examples in the data show that, in some
instances, schools have started accommodating learners with special
needs and have found ways to be open about HIV and Aids, even
under difficult conditions.

In the literature on diversity (in) education in non-African
contexts, health and disability-related factors play a central role
– mainly with a focus on the question of including learners with
special needs. Social stigma as experience of prejudice also plays a
role with regard to various diversity phenomena. Yet, the strong
cultural beliefs and norms expressed by the teachers in this study require special attention to the powerful discourses and taboos that mark the boundaries of speakable and non-speakable diversity matters in the Kenyan contexts – as in other African contexts – when thinking about diversity in education (Kalichman & Simbayi 2004; Rushahu 2017).

Socio-economic disparities

The causal factor of socio-economic disparities links to the aforementioned centre-periphery aspect, and also reveals some distinct features that explain the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation further. Depending on the setting of the school, the teachers experienced poverty and related social factors as a huge challenge – in some cases, as the dominant challenge with regard to diversity or disparities when teaching. In socio-economically heterogeneous schools, hierarchisation between those learners whose families were able to meet school-related costs and those who were not was reflected by, for example, attendance, the availability of school books and other resources and the ability to concentrate on learning. Based on the inability of the schools – through the government or other means – to cater for the basic needs of learners from poor backgrounds, orphans or homeless children, the social hierarchy becomes apparent in almost every aspect of school life.

In a homogeneously marginalised and disadvantaged set-up, the teachers reported that poverty and the often-desperate living conditions of the learners and their families almost completely dominated other social categories of difference. In this sense, the data produced in the study confirm what is highlighted by intersectional analysts – that not all categories of social inequality are activated in every context. Rather, structural, institutional and situational factors affect the strengths and the impact of each category of difference (Gross et al. 2016). Further, other intersecting lines of difference like gender or disability lead to further differentiation in the social hierarchy at its bottom end.
From a critical pedagogy perspective, it becomes obvious that teachers in socio-economically heterogeneous or poor settings are particularly confronted with the problem of being inescapably involved in the reproduction of social inequalities. In that way, they become unwilling agents of what they experience as imposed social hierarchy.

Existing literature on socio-economic diversity and discrimination in education in European states with social welfare systems often focuses on the reproduction of class and status differences (Amoroso et al. 2010; Haan & Elbers 2004). But the severe socio-economic disparities and profoundness of marginalisation in the Kenyan context (and other postcolonial African states) seems to require a different perspective on socio-economic disparities. On one hand, social support or social security structures are largely lacking – which deepens the impact on reproduction and enforcement of social inequality. On the other hand, the geographical and structural side of socio-economic disparities has to be taken into account in terms of the history of colonisation with its devastating regime of social categorisations, land entitlements, invention of the nation state and divide-and-rule practices.

Gender relations

Unequal gender relations between male and female teachers, and discriminatory treatment of girls, emerged as another causal factor in schools explaining the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation.\(^{19}\) In diversity and intersectional analysis, gender – often together with additional lines of difference – is a central category for the analysis of differentiation practices that lead to discrimination and inequality (Chege & Arnot 2012; Crenshaw 1994; Walgenbach 2017). In the Kenyan school context, the gender dimension of diversity was surpassed in significance by ethnic and socio-economic diversity for many of the teachers who affirmed that the strong focus on girl-children in education over past decades had improved the general situation towards gender
equality. However, the teachers' experiences of hierarchy based on gender relations could be either of the strong or the hidden variety, depending on the particular institutional cultures of the schools in which they were employed. The female teachers’ experiences included instances where they felt voiceless and with no authority over men in situations where they were superior (e.g. as heads of departments but ignored by male colleagues). They also experienced discrimination by men casting aspersions on them openly, based on their being female.

In schools located in remote areas where the categories of gender, religion and cultural beliefs intersected to discriminate girls in and out of school, the hierarchisation was apparent in every aspect of school life. The strong patriarchal organisation of life outside the schools affected teaching in many ways because girls were not allowed to participate in many school activities like physical education. Teachers who tried to change some of these practices and empower the girls in small ways were physically threatened and, ultimately, had to accept the preferential treatment given to the boys in every aspect of schooling that the community required of them. In a less severe way, male teachers shared that in their (middle-class, urban) schools, gender relations were equal between the male and the female teachers. However, they confirmed that at home, things had not changed and that women have to serve their husbands, even if they hold better positions in their professional lives.

Some of these examples are extreme and can certainly not be generalised for the whole of Kenya. However, the purpose of giving examples from the data is to provide insights into the ways in which patriarchy remains dominant as an oppressive system in parts of Kenyan society – and how teachers are affected by it. This is confirmed by Unesco's/WIDE statistical results, which highlight that gender equality with regard to education has been almost achieved when looking at the general situation in Kenya. But, when adding other social categories like religion and region, the outcomes are completely different – showing vast gender
inequalities in some regions (see Chapter 2). The data produced in this study confirm these disparities and highlight the usefulness of intersectional analyses, which show that the significance of the gender category depended on other lines of difference like religion, culture, socio-economic status and region.

**Conclusion**

In an attempt to reduce complexity concerning the drivers or causal factors that explain the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation, only the most prominent factors affecting the teachers in various realms of their profession and roles as teachers were included. While the centre-periphery disparity mainly looks at structural inequalities that relate to the unequal starting conditions for formal schooling (resulting mainly from education policy and curriculum), gender relations including the non-acceptance of inter- and transgender identities are largely effective through the immediate social setting around the school with cultural, religious, socio-economic and other aspects factoring in. The teaching of learners with disabilities or HIV and Aids mainly affects the teachers’ classroom experience and the school organisation; the challenge of social stigma and taboos comes from the wider society. Depending on the location of the school, tribalism and socio-economic disparities (as part of the wider struggle for recognition and redistribution in Kenya) dominated some teachers’ experience concerning diversity in schools.

Generally, the insights from this study confirm the need voiced by critical pedagogy and critical diversity, to interrogate schools in their relation to the wider social dynamics (Kincheloe 2004). Before the consequences of teachers’ actions and interactions with regard to the phenomenon are discussed, the next section first highlights the intervening conditions that influence the ways in which diversity is perceived and experienced, and in which the strategies and professional practices are developed.
The teachers’ own experiences with stigmatisation, othering and discrimination as intervening conditions

Thank God of my experience when I was poor, at least I try. (3:71)

Speaking about some of his learners from very poor backgrounds, this teacher referred to his own experience of being raised in a poor family – always dependent on support from various sources to continue with school. As a teacher now, he is empathetic with learners who struggle to keep up with their schoolwork because of their difficult living conditions, and he helps them where he can.

What this teacher expresses (and similarly, how other research participants referred to their own biographies) links to what Palmer (2017) conceptualises as the biography and the profession coming together in the teacher’s identity. With reference to the coding paradigm suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2014), the intervening conditions impacted on the ways in which interviewees made meaning of the phenomenon and how they responded to it in their actions/interactions – as well as on how the drivers affect the phenomenon itself. Hence, the data produced in this study include substantial information about the teachers’ lives and their experiences of diversity while growing up and becoming teachers. From these experiences, three major lines of difference or social categories emerged as significant in shaping the research participants’ identities: ethnicity, gender and socio-economic background (see Chapter 4). However, specific intersections of these three main categories made for a wide range of different experiences. It must be considered that this particular group of research participants had been especially successful when pursuing their education, showing high levels of resilience, determination and persistence in order to reach the point of postgraduate education where they were during the time of the interviews.

The narratives include various instances where research participants managed to extend the boundaries of their social identities, and challenged the roles and social positionalities attributed to them. This became apparent in the female research
participants’ fight for secondary education, questioning the tradition of endowing the boys preference over the girls. Their individual resistance to symbolic boundaries and allocated gendered identities defined by oppressive patriarchal structures came at a time of general social and political movements towards gender equality in Kenya. However, the individual narratives of the female teachers across different ethnic communities and contexts revealed numerous sociocultural practices and everyday interactions that manifested their low social position and the strong hierarchisation within the category gender that they had encountered in their immediate family context from a very young age. These included experiences of gender-based violence, stereotyping, exclusion, intimidation and subordination. Of the various factors that led to questioning and challenging of stereotypes and discrimination that the female research participants were faced with, and which affected their education, two aspects need to be highlighted. First, their intrinsic zeal for education (including their good and sometimes outstanding academic performance in school), which encouraged them to stand up against their families’ expectation of early marriage after primary school – even leaving parents to fend for themselves and fight for their schooling on their own. Second, the exposure to learners and teachers from various sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds in secondary school, which opened up perspectives of other gendered identities and hierarchies and raised questions about what had previously appeared as normal. These learning aspects of multi-perspectivity and self-reflexivity refer to what is discussed in the literature as intercultural or diversity competencies (Barrett 2011; Walgenbach 2017).

Ethnic identity emerged as a relevant factor in all the teachers’ biographies, holding a range of different positive and negative experiences. The positive ones included the sense of belonging, the ability to foster good relationships with people from different ethnic communities and the solidarity among the members of one’s own ethnic community. The personal advantage of being exposed to ethnically mixed environments was highlighted in all of the interviews. This included learning to adapt to different
habits and to develop empathy, the discovery of commonalities and development of friendships, a better understanding of others’ points of view, experiencing new and reflecting on own ways of doing things. The positive experiences and benefits that emerged from the data resonate with concepts of learning particular attitudes, cognitive and behavioural skills that are commonly referred to as intercultural or diversity competence (e.g. Barrett 2011; Walgenbach 2017).

The positive experiences were accompanied by various negative experiences including discrimination, stereotyping, exclusion, stigmatisation, violence and other mechanisms to assign ethnic identities particular positionalities and create or perpetuate hierarchies between different ethnic groups. The relational positionalities and othering practices manifested clearly in the ways in which some teachers explained their social positions. One teacher, who belonged to an ethnic group commonly understood to be one of the most powerful in the Kenyan national context, explained that he belongs to a sub-group of that group, as defined by region, cultural habits, accent and so forth. As a member of this lower sub-group, the discrimination and exclusion he experienced growing up and in going to university emanated mainly from members of his own main group who belonged to higher ranked or more powerful sub-groups. These hierarchical ordering systems that can be grasped with the theoretical concept of othering (which has served to interrogate colonial relations in today’s postcolonial societies) serve to create differences that legitimise and perpetuate oppressive systems of power (Riegel 2016: 52). This also links to what Steyn (2014: 382) calls the ‘unequal symbolic and material value of different locations’ and the recognition that social spaces include great disparities, inconsistencies and contradictions. Not all people who are regarded as holding a particular social position, such as belonging to a powerful ethnic group, benefit the same from the privileges awarded to that group (Steyn 2014). Particularly so, given that the socially constructed and ascribed ethnic identity does not necessarily match with the one that an individual would choose themselves (Nyairo 2015). In all the
narrations, common or different language appeared as a powerful tool to sow divisions, exclusion and mistrust between ethnic groups – or to foster closeness and bonding between members of the own group.

The third relevant factor with regard to experiences of discrimination, othering, stigmatisation and social hierarchisation refers to socio-economic background, more specifically to poverty and low social status. Especially in socio-economically mixed environments and schools, research participants who grew up in poor families or rural areas had a range of experiences where they were stigmatised, discriminated against and excluded, even by their teachers. Besides the family income and poor living conditions, growing up as an orphan or being raised by a single mother were reasons to be severely stigmatised and looked down upon by peers.

In summary, all the biographical narrations included experiences of discrimination, exclusion, stigmatisation or stereotyping based on gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background to greater or lesser extents. These negative experiences and the suffering they caused link to the teachers’ professional biographies. Explicitly or implicitly, the teachers explained how these experiences sensitised them to recognise issues of discrimination and the construction of hierarchies in their professional teaching practice, and how they became their main sources of motivation for intervening and supporting similarly affected learners. Despite discriminatory practices and stereotypes intended to discourage individuals because of their gendered or ethnicised identities, the research participants did not give up. The evidence that proved the social hierarchisation wrong has its roots in the biographies and lived experiences of the research participants. The findings suggest that the experience helped facilitate an understanding of the social dimension and mechanisms of boundary-making and hierarchisation in general. On the other hand, all interview participants reported on their positive diversity experiences when growing up and the benefits in terms of social skills, widening their perspectives and ability to adapt.
The research participants’ perceptions of diversity revealed a mainly positive, non-essentialising and power critical notion that presumably developed from their own experiences of discrimination and social hierarchisation that they had successfully challenged. They also reflected critically on the ways in which lines of difference are used in Kenyan society to create divisions and social hierarchies that manifest as social inequality and marginalisation for specific groups. Returning to Palmer (2017), who points to the importance of biographical experiences and identities of teachers, this section highlighted those diversity-related experiences that the teachers described as significant in their own lives. Hence, the research participants’ experiences with regard to diversity are found to be intervening conditions that affect the way in which professional teachers in schools perceive and experience diversity and the consequent professional practices and strategies they develop.

**Teachers’ strategies and their consequences**

The professional practices and strategies the teachers employed to respond to the imposed hierarchisation that they experienced relating to various diversity aspects in their schools (as described in Chapter 5) were limited by structural, institutional and sociocultural factors. On a structural level, the national school and examination system (that is not responsive to the vast centre-periphery disparity or socio-economic differences) sets boundaries for teachers’ strategies because all learners compete in the same education system despite their different preconditions for success. On an institutional level, boundaries arise mainly from the fact that most schools are under-resourced and there are few if any provisions made for, for example, learners from poor families or learners with disabilities. Sociocultural boundaries, which are more prevalent in some regions and schools than in others, derive from norms and taboos that guard changes and power shifts in specific areas. These general delimitations affect the schools and teachers in different ways depending on the location and configuration of
the school. However, since they define the space for the teachers’ strategies and professional practices towards diversity issues in a more general sense, they need to be taken into consideration in this section when looking at the teachers’ strategies and presumed consequences thereof.

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, I distinguish between strategies presumably leading to more hierarchisation and social inequality and maintaining the status quo (Type A strategies) and those presumably leading to de-hierarchisation and social justice (Type B strategies). To do this, both types of strategy will be discussed in the context of critical pedagogy, postcolonialism and critical diversity. Hence, Type A strategies take place within the abovementioned boundaries of imposed hierarchisation with its causal factors on the different levels, and Type B strategies challenge the status quo and push boundaries towards change and social equality. However, what became apparent in all the interviews was that the teachers’ responses to challenges connected to diversity were often ad hoc remedial measures for learners who experienced severe distress. Although these short-term and ad hoc responses surfaced as the main category of professional diversity practice for some teachers (see Chapter 5), they are not part of the discussion at this point. This is because the presumed long-term social effects of these practices are regarded as marginal and not strategic in the sense of the teachers making decisions between a range of different possible actions. Yet, the attitude to help and feel responsible for the well-being of the learners outside the 40-minute lesson, which became apparent in all the teachers’ accounts to a greater or lesser degree, is remarkable in itself, given the – sometimes extreme – challenges the teachers experience in their professional practice on a daily basis. The following discussion on the teachers’ strategies and the perceived consequences thereof focuses on practices responding to diversity in terms of hierarchisation, discrimination, othering and exclusion in the schools and classrooms.

The purpose of distinguishing between Type A and Type B strategies is not to judge the teachers’ competencies to handle
diversity. It has become obvious that there is a huge disparity between the different schools concerning opportunities for pushing boundaries towards social equality, rooted in the different configurations and settings of the particular school. The data also revealed that the teachers who participated in the study are overburdened with requirements that go far beyond the classical role of a teacher. Hence, the space for developing strategies and professional practices that potentially push for social justice is very limited for individual teachers. Often, one teacher would practise Type A and Type B strategies concurrently by responding to specific aspects of diversity in different ways. Yet, by differentiating between Type A and Type B strategies, I aim to find a specific angle for interrogating the encounters of diversity (Vertovec 2014) in Kenyan schools and to highlight the conflicting space for teachers’ professional practices. In doing so, I aim to extract some theoretically grounded recommendations as to how teacher education in Kenya can prepare teachers to respond to diversity and deal with the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation they are likely to experience in their professional practice.

Figure 11 visualises the main strategies that emerged from the teachers’ interviews, and which will be discussed using examples from the data in the section below.

**Ignoring/considering different backgrounds**

The teachers’ awareness of the socio-economic, cultural, ethnic, religious, and so forth, backgrounds of the learners transpired as the starting point for interventions and professional practices with regard to diversity that they experienced as imposed hierarchisation. An example of the Type A strategy to ignore the backgrounds of learners was shared by Dora, who taught learners who had fled from war-ridden Sudan. These students' at times tumultuous and, from the teachers' perspectives, insubordinate and seemingly unsocial behaviour would occasionally disrupt lessons until the learners themselves requested to be heard. The
teacher then allowed them to talk in class about their traumatising experiences, which was when she realised the causes of some of their behaviour. Ignoring that background had marginalised the learners in the lessons, which were designed for middle-class Kenyan learners.

Examples of Type B strategies, namely actively accommodating and welcoming learners with different backgrounds, emerged, for instance, in the context of socio-economic and ethnic diversity as well as disability. To understand the background of the learners in his class, Gerald established weekly group counselling sessions, open to all learners in the class, in order to foster exchange on issues bothering the learners outside school. In doing so, he learnt about what they went through and, to encourage them, he shared his own story of the hardship he had to go through before he
became a teacher. These counselling sessions helped build close relationships with the learners and among the learners, and made everyone feel welcome, whatever their background. This humanising approach came at a cost, though, as the sad stories Gerald heard made him realise how little he could do to support the learners beyond listening to them. As a caring person, he also went to families’ homes when he heard a child with disabilities had been hidden due to the stigma attached. He persuaded such parents to send the child to school where they had established classes for learners with special needs. Embracing learners with their different backgrounds and identities, and accommodating them in the school emerged as the most important prerequisite for this school, where the learners mostly suffered from poverty and its social ills. This teacher’s attitude and de-hierarchising strategies changed the focus from academic achievement to accommodating learners from diverse backgrounds in the school and providing support to disadvantaged learners wherever possible. It can be presumed that this caring attitude – which was supported by an accommodating school culture in general – also helped to prevent discrimination and stigmatisation among the learners, which was not a significant issue in that school, according to the teacher.

As a more technical and institutional Type B approach, Harald’s school established student records in which they encouraged each learner who entered the boarding school to detail their background in terms of ethnicity, religion, health and other specificities relevant to their identity and that might be used to stigmatisise, discriminate or stereotype the learner. This record was available to the teachers and Harald confirmed that it helped them, especially in terms of preventing and identifying the causes of conflicts, exclusion and discrimination among the learners, as these would often break out along ethnic alignments, health-related stigma and different cultural practices. At the same time, the school’s and teachers’ strategies towards the learners aimed to decrease ethnic group consciousness and to create physical spaces for peace messages and dialogue. This included events
where motivational speakers were invited to talk about the value of embracing differences, about commonalities and humanness as opposed to tribalism, discrimination and exclusion.

This two-tier approach – registering the learners’ identities in terms of different social categories on the one hand, and teaching commonalities and unity on the other – illustrates the area of conflict with which strategies addressing diversity issues are faced, that is, between reproducing and deconstructing social categorisations. It recalls the discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of group-centred versus deconstructionist perspectives on diversity (Cooper 2004; Riegel 2016). Record-keeping of each learner’s identity promotes an essentialising view of social categories and symbolic boundaries together with specific prejudices, stereotypes and assignment of positionalities. With regard to the teachers, this is problematic as research has shown that teachers’ expectations concerning academic success can be linked to specific social categories (e.g. Harlin et al. 2009). Moreover, this practice promotes a view of diversity that takes social categories as fixed constants and hence, perpetuates hierarchies and promotes othering (Riegel 2016). The rationale to introduce such a register emerged from the violent ethnic conflicts of 2007/2008 by which the school was badly affected, and it has proven to be a tool to prevent further conflict. The teachers’ strategy to make social categorisations as irrelevant as possible for the learners can be read as an attempt to disrupt the cycle of constant reproduction of social categorisations. While the strategy of student record keeping cannot be regarded as a straightforward tool for de-hierarchisation and social justice, it can be regarded as a temporary means to raise awareness of powerful lines of difference among the teachers in order to recognise discriminatory, stigmatising or exclusionary practices among the learners as a basis for intervention. However, in times of rivalry and distorted power relations between different ethnic groups, the danger of misuse of information about social categorisations (e.g. ethnic group affiliation) by fellow students or by teachers, is real.
Stigmatising/changing perspectives

As discussed above, schools in the periphery are put under pressure by having to conform to national standards and curricula that ignore regional differences concerning language, culture, religion and socio-economic configurations. The diversity that teachers are confronted with emerges from the disparity between the policies and design of formal education and the communities in which these policies and designs do not fit. The language of instruction serves as an example of teachers’ strategies responding to this type of experienced diversity.

To promote English in a remote school and stop the learners from speaking their local language during break-time, Beth practised what she had learned in other schools: a child caught speaking mother tongue on the school ground has to wear a sack labelled ‘I am stupid’ for the rest of the day. This Type A practice of stigmatising and othering learners for speaking their home language (and, in the process, devaluing that language while elevating English and Kiswahili as languages of education) is in line with national policies of postcolonial Kenya. However, Neville Alexander, who wrote extensively about language in education in postcolonial Africa, summarises the position of the former colonial languages as follows:

Let us make it explicit … that it is an indisputable fact that in the post-colonial situation, the linguistic hierarchy built into the colonial system led to knowledge of the conquerors’ language becoming a vital component of the ‘cultural capital’ of the neo-colonial elite. (2000: 11)

Disadvantage for many learners in rural and peripheral areas in Kenya arises from the fact that English and Kiswahili are the languages of instruction and assessment – yet those languages play hardly any role in the daily lives of these communities, unlike for people living in urban areas where the languages are commonplace. As much as it can be understood why the postcolonial Kenyan
government determined English and Kiswahili as official languages in formal education, it puts teachers and learners in peripheral regions at a disadvantage. Consequently, this contributes to social inequality and hierarchisation – not to mention the loss of social diversity, multiple epistemologies and philosophies that are excluded from formal education.

Beth’s practice to make the learners speak English to help them succeed in school can be regarded as standing in the tradition of othering and ‘civilising’ (even though her intention was to support the learners), and follows the hegemonic discourse on successful education. From a general critical pedagogy point of view, alienating learners from their own environments by excluding their language and cultural resources promotes a positivist ‘mind as memory chips’ approach, instead of viewing learning as a process of constructing new relationships in the interaction of cultural understandings, new information, familiar stories, and so forth (Kincheloe 2004: 115).

The current language policy in education, therefore, puts teachers in peripheral regions under pressure because they have to respond to the contradictions that arise from the fact that the communities in which they teach do not speak the language of formal education. Yet, Beth saw no way to help the learners succeed in their schooling other than to accept and perpetuate (or, in this case reinforce) the imposed hierarchisation of languages.

Beth’s example of a Type A strategy occurred because she had to teach in a language that the learners could barely speak, and which some openly rejected. To keep up with what is required in formal education, the learners and the community developed strategies to undermine the system, which made it impossible for Beth to fulfil her assigned role. In the end, she was forced to help learners cheat in the national exams, which she abhorred but felt she was not able to oppose or resist because it would have been life threatening.

The conflict arising from the national school curriculum and policy and the configuration of that remote school for the teacher was immense and not resolvable. While the othering strategy using
stigmatisation can serve as an example of more hierarchisation, the presumed consequences of undermining the system and helping learners to cheat to pass the exam is not that distinct. Since the system itself is not just, it is undermined in order to attain social justice and give learners in the remote area a chance to carry on with their formal education. In this case, the teacher's strategy to help the learners cheat did not happen voluntarily or by plan – on the contrary, it was against the teacher's professional ethos.

A more distinct example of a Type B strategy to avoid stigmatisation, and to actively consider different perspectives, concerns diversity in the classroom when teaching about HIV and Aids. Florence empathised with her HIV-positive learners in class and realised that the approach taken in the curriculum to teach HIV and Aids was based on fear and stigma, and would demoralise learners who were born HIV-positive. Hence, she changed her teaching strategy and the curriculum content in a way that was sensitive towards HIV-positive learners and consciously considered their perspective. By doing so, this teacher found a way to intentionally avoid further stigmatisation, which emerged from her ability to empathise with this vulnerable group of learners.

In order to fight stigmatisation, othering and discrimination among learners, Harald reported that he worked in a commission with other teachers to invite motivational speakers on a regular basis. This raised awareness about the functions of hierarchising practices and supported an accepting attitude and respectful behaviour regarding differences. The strategy to invite motivational speakers who would address the learners of a school and appeal to them to behave morally and ethically – often with a Christian religious background – was mentioned by a number of teachers as a tool to influence learners' behaviour with regard to diversity. This diversity affirming approach to influencing the attitude and behaviour of learners to prevent conflict based on experienced differences can have hierarchising or de-hierarchising effects, depending on the focus and paradigmatic stance. If a perspective criticising power structures and social inequality is adopted, it can
have de-hierarchising effects. If it merely serves to appeal to the learners to accept and respect differences without questioning the mechanisms and functions of prejudice, stereotypes and hierarchies, it can have essentialising, homogenising and hierarchising effects – even if the behaviour and attitudes of the learners become more accepting. Without closer investigation into the underlying values and individual focus of the motivational speakers, it is not possible to predict whether the strategy would produce less or more hierarchisation. However, it does speak to the conflicting field of power critical versus affirmative diversity approaches, and indicates that both approaches might be necessary when looking at diversity competencies. While power critical diversity approaches stress the competence to deconstruct, reflect on and critically analyse social structures and power relations, affirmative diversity approaches focus on the ability of individuals to manage diversity successfully (Walgenbach 2017).

Exclusion/inclusion

One of the Type A strategies that teachers reported in terms of learners with diverse abilities and preconditions for academic learning emerged from situations of overcrowded classrooms. Feeling under pressure to manage the subject matter in a 40-minute lesson, some teachers admitted that they used the common strategy to only work with the fast learners and ignore those who did not understand easily. In under-resourced schools with huge classes and little if any provision for learners with special needs, teachers’ strategies to respond to diversity are limited and hence, experienced as imposed hierarchisation. The teachers realised the exclusionist strategy that they practise by meeting the requirements of the curriculum and only working with the ‘ideal learner’ but felt that they do not have a choice if they want at least some learners to succeed.

In an attempt to apply a Type B strategy in that situation, Ana made sure to give space to learners who didn’t understand the
subject matter easily and encouraged them to ask their questions. When she noticed that some slower-learning children in her class were mobbed and bullied by their classmates, she talked to the class and counselled the affected learners separately. She made it clear to her class that people are different and that those who do not conform to what is expected in the school are also welcome, need support and that discrimination and mobbing is a serious offence. In Ana’s view, the task of the teacher is to be a role model and to support learners to develop empathy, respect and consideration for others who do not fit the perceived norm. Ana’s professional practice in the classroom promoted a de-hierarchising perspective because her strategy to include slow learners and encourage them to participate in class complies with teaching all learners; it is not the fault of the individual who does not fit into the system – it is the system that does not fit all learners.

Similarly, Florence experienced the strong focus on academic and examination-orientated teaching as not suitable for many learners, especially those from rural areas. Instead of looking at these learners from a deficit perspective, she observed that their strengths were oral presentations and performative arts. Therefore, she included teaching strategies where the non-pen-and-paper learners could excel, which brought them from the margins of the class to the centre, at least for these teaching units.

Using a variety of teaching strategies and methods of instruction (as well as simple language for learners with less exposure to English) supports a de-hierarchising dynamic, and includes learners with different abilities and preconditions for learning. It presumes that the teacher is competent at recognising differences and is sensitive to their needs – as discussed as a diversity learning area in the literature (see Chapter 2). However, the exam-oriented system and the fact that learners are all assessed in the same way (whether they can buy school books or not, have electricity at home or not, speak the language of instruction well or not) was of concern to Florence and some other interview participants facing their professional limits in terms of including all learners.
Harnessing/reproducing: Disrupting social categories

As discussed in the literature (Chapter 2), using social categories to identify disadvantaged groups in certain settings (in order to take affirmative action measures that specifically support these groups) aims at social justice and de-hierarchisation. The problem of conflicting spaces that emerge through the reproduction of these social categories, while at the same time trying to dissolve them or make them irrelevant, is a dilemma that has been highlighted as a matter of concern in the field of diversity in education (Leiprecht 2009; Walgenbach 2017). Nonetheless, in specific situations, the strategy of utilising or harnessing existing social categorisations might be necessary and conducive to de-hierarchisation. However, the examples from the data highlight the problematic consequences of the teachers differentiating between certain groups.

The strategies that promote the reproduction of social categories in schools included instances where the teachers consciously considered specific social categories in order to treat one group of learners differently from others. One such example is provided by Florence, who was constantly torn between treating the HIV-positive learners in her class differently and treating them the same as the others. She felt responsible to shield them from harmful effects that would weaken them, like disciplinary measures involving corporal punishment or physical activities. The conflict was particularly sensitive because she was trying to hide their HIV-positive status (and hence, the criteria for the construction of the category and the reason for the different treatment) from the other learners in the class. She realised that the HIV-positive learners wanted to be treated the same as the other learners, and felt discriminated against if a teacher was considerate and spared them from, for example, punishment. From the affected learners’ perspective, well-intended different treatment manifests as a discriminatory and hierarchising practice because they want to be considered ‘normal’ learners. This is particularly due to the
stigma surrounding HIV and Aids (and the reason the teacher hid the status of HIV-positive learners). Together, the hiding of the status – and hence, the missed chance to create awareness, sensitivity and empathy among the learners – and the different treatment, even if for good reason, can therefore be considered a Type A strategy.

Other examples of Type A strategy that emerged from the interviews in terms of reproducing or harnessing specific lines of difference relate to ethnic group affiliation and mother tongue speaking. Some teachers reported that they would fall back on speaking mother tongue to the learners in class or during break time as this would come naturally to them, even though they were aware that not all learners could understand them. Chris admitted that he – as other teachers did too – paid more attention to learners who shared his ethnic background. Coming from a marginalised sub-group of one of the bigger ethnic groups, he felt the experience of being othered and not taken seriously created solidarity among the members of his sub-group such that parents would particularly approach him and entrust him with their children. His strategy as a teacher was to assist learners from his own ethnic background more than the others, especially in a class setting where they were in the minority.

Evidently, this strategy, which he described as common practice among teachers, is grounded in his own identity and experience. While it can be argued that the marginalisation of his sub-group is the problem in the first place, and that learners from that group need to be particularly supported in order to be empowered, falling back on or enforcing powerful social boundaries perpetuates and reproduces hierarchisation grounded in tribalism. The distinction between ‘we’ and ‘the others’ is problematic, as is the likelihood that other lines of difference or social categories are less recognised and acknowledged as reasons for marginalisation and discrimination for learners in the school. Similarly, the speaking of mother tongue to learners of one’s own ethnic background created closeness between the teacher and the particular group of learners from which the other learners are
excluded. In the Kenyan context, where tribalism and hierarchies concerning ethnic groups pervade the social and political arena, the consequence of this ethnic bonding strategy in schools needs to be interpreted as the reproduction of the social boundaries that enforce such hierarchisation.

On the other hand, Type B strategies emerged that disrupt social boundary-making and can be regarded as de-hierarchising professional practices (e.g. with regard to ethnic groups, disability and gender). As shown in Chapter 5, these strategies were mainly developed as ad hoc professional practices responding to cases of discrimination and exclusion that the teachers experienced in their schools and classrooms. The teachers used these incidents to speak about issues of social diversity, discrimination and marginalisation to their class and sensitise the learners about offending language and terms they must avoid. One teacher, who observed major discrimination based on socio-economic background among the learners in her class, introduced anonymous letters about incidents of discrimination to the guidance and counselling teacher who then came to speak to the class. The aim of this intervention was to create empathy with the offended learners, raise awareness about human rights issues, develop an understanding of the functions of discrimination and prohibit offensive and discriminatory terms. In that way, it connects to facets of Steyn’s (2014) critical diversity literacy, namely, the facilitation of a vocabulary to unpack discrimination and different systems of power and understand how they function. They also aim to develop empathy, multi-perspectivity and communicative skills and behaviours in the learners and to show them alternative ways of resolving conflicts – which connects to what has been identified as intercultural or diversity competences (see Chapter 2).

Similarly, Harald reported that in his school, the teachers actively tried to create spaces where tribalism is not tolerated because this was the main reason for discrimination among the learners. This points to what Hormel and Scherr (2005) highlight as a necessary component of diversity education – to facilitate experiences where group differences are irrelevant.
Acceptance/advocacy

Acceptance describes another Type A strategy practised by the teachers to deal with hierarchised social categories of diversity that are guarded by potent taboos. The teachers accepted that certain topics (like different sexualities and full gender equality in terms of the organisation of peoples’ private lives) were not negotiable because the communities, the parents and churches would not accept any teaching about, for example, homosexuality or questioning prevalent inequalities between men and women (e.g. in the domestic arena). Harald, for instance, has no doubt that he would be in trouble and meet severe resistance if he crossed the line of what was perceived as acceptable in the society and local community. Learners in boarding schools suspected of or found to be involved in homosexual acts are excluded from school with no chance that the behaviour would be tolerated in any way. Harald sees no way to change this negating practice and therefore accepts the consequence of learners being excluded from school because of dominant discourses. Other teachers also confirmed that it was unthinkable to teach comprehensive sexuality education because this was a taboo and would be a dangerous practice for the teachers.

Another example where taboos governed most of the teachers’ strategies towards diversity refers to learners infected with HIV. As a rule, the teachers accepted that the status of such learners needs to be hidden in order to protect them from stigmatisation and violence. Abandoning any response that would question the taboos and the social hierarchy in these respects can be regarded as a strategy that supports the status quo and reproduces existing hierarchisation.

While examples for Type B strategies concerning diverse sexualities and HIV and Aids are missing from the data, a teacher’s strategy that emerged to deal with strongly guarded power relations and extremely marginalised positionalities refers to advocacy – understood as acting on behalf of disempowered learners or positions. Based on the perception of the teachers being role
models who need to find ways of utilising their position to start changing dominant attitudes and practices, some of the teachers developed strategies to try and disrupt hegemonic patterns (e.g. concerning gender relations and poverty). As the only female teacher who was given a leadership position in her school, Elsa did not accept the discrimination and disrespect her male colleagues exhibited towards her. She voiced the discrimination and concern to the teachers and approached the male school principal to educate him about what needed to change to achieve gender equality. Her strategy to win over the most powerful person in the school to support her cause of de-hierarchisation, and to act on behalf of a female teacher who felt silenced, initiated change in that school.

Observing the devastating poverty of some learners’ families, and the corruption preventing social support grants from reaching them, Gerald physically went to local politicians and officials to voice such grievances. He also accompanied the families to help them fill in necessary documents, making sure that they were not left out and got the support they needed to send their children to school. This approach consciously considers different positionalities in terms of power to shape one’s life. In a context without proper social work infrastructure, the teacher felt the need to use his position to support his destitute learners’ families. Although this can be considered a diversity competence (see Chapter 2), the strategy is likely to promote feelings of excessive demand and burnout in teachers at schools situated in poverty-stricken areas.

**Avoiding/addressing conflicts**

A general distinction that can be drawn between Type A and Type B strategies refers to the teachers’ attitude and liability to avoid or address and challenge conflicts or problems arising from the imposed hierarchisation they experienced regarding diversity issues. What became apparent in the data was that the school’s culture and hence, the institutional framing had an impact on
the question of whether conflicts, inequalities or discrimination would be addressed or not.

Observing instances of discrimination and exclusion (e.g., based on social class demarcations among the learners), Chris raised the issue in teachers’ meetings. However, nothing happened to follow up and address the issue, which frustrated him. As a teacher, he thought avoiding such conflicts was not right – particularly since it reminded him of how he suffered under similar conditions when he was at school. However, he was not sure about strategies to address the discrimination and exclusion he observed, since, from his point of view, it was an institutional problem and not a problem of the learners in his class alone.

A contrasting Type B strategy that Elsa chose was to involve the guidance and counselling department and initiate regular discussions in class to address conflicts and problems concerning discrimination and exclusion that learners experienced. Beth developed a strategy to challenge some of the patriarchal ways of doing things in the remote rural school where she was the only female teacher. She attempted to influence individuals – in this case girls who were negatively affected by the community’s practices of female genital mutilation, early marriage and discrimination against women and girls, in general. She encouraged them to complete their education and especially supported the gifted ones who were marginalised due to their educational success. When she had established good relationships with the learners, she began whole-class discussions to challenge the boys on hierarchising and discriminating practices in humorous ways. As the only person from outside the community, she could not accept the status quo but felt responsible to present the learners with different perspectives and initiate learners’ critical thinking, even though the dominance of patriarchal practices was overwhelming. The basis for initiating dialogue between herself as an outsider and the learners from the remote community as a de-hierarchising strategy was a trusting relationship that took time to establish. Even though this strategy of initiating critical thinking and making the learners question their own ways of doing things might have had only minor effects
in terms of de-hierarchisation, it pushed the boundaries towards gender equality and the empowerment of girls.

What has become apparent in this study is that the teachers usually analysed the conflicts arising due to diversity as being imposed hierarchisation in the schools, and they tried to develop strategies to address these conflicts wherever possible. This confirms existing views in the literature on intercultural and diversity competence, that teachers and educators require conflict resolution skills (Barrett 2011).

Conclusion

To clarify the relationship between the general context, the causal factors or drivers of the phenomenon, the intervening conditions and the teachers’ professional practices with their presumed consequences, the coding paradigm suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998) for developing a grounded theory was applied to structure the data. This put the configurations, representations and encounters of diversity (Vertovec 2014) in Kenyan school contexts as perceived, experienced and practised by the teachers into focus. To conclude these main findings, Figure 12 illustrates the central theoretical model developed for the teachers’ perceptions, experiences and practices concerning diversity in education in Kenya. Whereas Figure 12 highlights both Type A (hierarchising) and Type B (de-hierarchising) strategies, Figure 13 portrays the Type B strategies that guide the way forward with regard to diversity practices that foster de-hierarchisation and social equality.

The postcolonial nation state of Kenya with its centralised education system, language policy and geography (as sketched in Chapter 3) provides the general context or case for this study, delineating the configurations of diversity for Kenyan schools. From these contextual factors, I identified the centre-periphery disparity as the major configuration influencing the question of how teachers in Kenyan schools perceive and experience diversity. The discrepancy between the centre (the perceived normal urban,
middle-class, multilingual Kenyan school, for which education policies, laws and curricula are designed) and the periphery (schools in remote or rural areas that do not fit this norm) generates a wide range of different positionalities and conditions for the schools. These conditions determine how the learners in a school are perceived as different or other, and pose the question of how the school deals with that structural discrimination. Even though no fully-fledged intersectional analysis of different positionalities and the mechanisms producing them was done, the intersectional perspective provided a general lens for developing the theory – acknowledging that social positionalities are not fixed and that social categories interrelate.

Imposed hierarchisation was identified as the central phenomenon from the data to depict the teachers’ experiences and
perceptions of diversity in the schools that offered insights into the representations of diversity in the Kenyan education context. Due to social categorisations and dominant discourses framed by the centre-periphery context, diversity appears as a hierarchising phenomenon that is imposed by, and effective through, these social structures and discourses. The social hierarchy in the context of diversity in education produces an ordering system that defines an individual learner’s positionality in terms of access to educational resources and recognition of their identity in the schools’ institutional frameworks, curricula and teaching practice. The main causal factors explaining the phenomenon of imposed hierarchisation – (a) tribalism, (b) body-related norms and values, (c) socio-economic disparities and (d) gender relations in their specificities – were carved out from the data and discussed using the lens of critical pedagogy and critical diversity. These representations of diversity in the schools, which stem from and reflect the power relations in the society, manifest through taboos, stigma and discriminatory practices that marginalise and silence specific identities and hence, reproduce social inequality.

With regard to the encounters of diversity, insights have been provided by interrogating the intervening conditions (conceptualised as the teachers’ biographical experiences and identities as well as the teachers’ professional practices) or strategies teachers apply to deal with phenomena related to diversity as an imposed hierarchisation in the schools. With reference to Palmer (2017), the research participants’ biographies (with their experiences of discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion based on gender, socio-economic or ethnic background) became the point of reference and the basis for their acting on and responding to diversity factors emerging in their professional practice. Despite painful experiences of being discriminated against, othered, stereotyped and excluded when growing up, the research participants became successful teachers and postgraduate students due to their perseverance and struggle against the mechanisms trying to consign them to lower positions in the social hierarchy. Grounded in these experiences, the teachers demonstrated great
sensitivity towards diversity issues – and their close and problematic relationship to power and dominance – they encountered in the schools. Hence, in their professional practice they developed various strategies to respond to and counteract discrimination, stigmatisation and othering in the schools.

Using the lens of critical pedagogy and its focus on social justice and de-hierarchisation, I divided the teachers’ strategies into those effectively (and not intentionally) perpetuating the status quo or enforcing hierarchisation (Type A) and those strategies pushing the boundaries and effectively leading to de-hierarchisation and social equality (Type B). These different strategies offer insights into the opportunities and limitations for developing strategies that can lead to social justice, de-hierarchisation and equality in the given school contexts. The six principles, from which the Type B strategies developed, encompass (1) consideration of various backgrounds/identities of learners, (2) consideration of multiple perspectives, (3) utilisation of a variety of teaching techniques, (4) sensitisation of learners and colleagues about discrimination, (5) provision of a role model and practising agency/advocacy and (6) the general ability and willingness to address conflicts. The results of this study suggest that these types of strategies are potential tools and approaches for teachers to engage with diversity issues in Kenyan schools in a way that leads to less discrimination and hierarchisation and hence, to more social cohesion – a value and guiding principle of education in Kenya. However, the teachers’ strategies are very likely insufficient to fully counter the effects of the identified causal factors regarding the emergence of imposed hierarchisation. They, thus, need to be complemented by general political and societal responses to counteract tribalism, body-related discriminatory norms and values, socio-economic disparities and problematic gender relations.