Empathy-based stories capturing the voice of female secondary school students in Tanzania

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Tanzania, like many other African countries, has had a rapid expansion of its secondary education sector. This has resulted in large numbers of secondary school graduates struggling to build a future through continuing education or finding employment.[2] Students are faced with the difficult task of assessing their opportunities in the face of various challenges and making plans to build a better life. The research presented uses empathy-based stories to identify which elements were considered important by the students in determining their success in education. The analysis of narrative data represents a shared cultural meaning on the social and cultural support available to students. The findings suggest that using empathy-based stories as a methological tool can provide valuable insights for culture-sensitive and intercultural research through its ability to widen the context of discovery.

Keywords: empathy-based stories, Tanzanian youth, secondary education, transitions, future-orientation

Introduction

Student perspectives on educational transitions and the social formation of young people's future orientation are widely researched areas in Western countries (see e.g., Pollard and Filer 2007, Thomson et al. 2002, Malmberg 1998, Hurrelmann 1989). This study extends this research on future orientation to the vast African continent and more precisely, to young people living and studying in Tanzania. A recent analysis of gender, education and inclusion in the Tanzanian education sector carried out by Okkolin, Lehtomäki and Bhalalusesa (2010) highlights the importance of understanding the socially and culturally constructed meanings of education. Qualitative research can complement current policy and strategy discussions promoting the education and empowerment of girls who are marginalised at the higher levels of the education system.[3] Stambach's (2000) work on the education of girls in the Kilimanjaro Region of Tanzania

1

demonstrates the significant role of knowledge of the local context when conducting research on education.

Here, new ways of studying the social worlds of African youth while respecting the contextual particularities and the key issues, as defined by the young people themselves are explored. A particular focus has been to find new ways to study the social and cultural factors contributing to girls' education by using methods that can give voice to the girls and analyse education from the students' perspectives. Breidlid (2009), Toncy (2008) Lange (2001) and Prazak (1999) have applied qualitative approaches to their studies on culture and changing social relations in Africa as represented in documents, popular drama, dance and student essays[4]. These interesting experimentations utilising various sources of data have encouraged this further look into the potential of open, narrative approaches to the study of Tanzanian youth. J. Eskola's (1998) extensive and encouraging experience in applying empathy-based stories in social research in Finland inspired me to test the method in the Tanzanian context. The purpose of this article is to present and discuss the experience of using empathy-based stories and to assess the applicability and appropriateness of the data collection method for studying the realities of young women in Dar es Salaam, the capital city of Tanzania.

Earlier studies have verified the strong impact of social and cultural factors in the future-orientation and educational careers of secondary school students (see e.g. Malmberg 1998, Pollard and Filer 2007). A longitudinal ethnography in the Identity and Learning Programme, Pollard & Filer (2007) explore the process of the learners' attempts to give personal meaning to their lives. Students shape their identities at the intersection of home, school and peer group influences. Wider political and cultural discourses are interpreted in the interaction within and between these groups. Through this interaction, individuals gain and interpret the cultural knowledge necessary for the development of personal future goals. Malmberg (1998) defines the elements of cultural knowledge, self-evaluation and future goals as the components of individuals'future-orientation. Following

Entwistle (1990), Malmberg (1998) suggests that the influence of informal social organisation could equal or surpass the effect of the school's formal organisation on socio-emotional and academic development.

Recent studies of East African youth have analysed the nature and impact of the social and cultural context on the individual's educational experience, aspirations and meaning making. In her anthropological study in the Kilimanjaro region of Tanzania, Stambach (2000) paints a picture of education as an enabling context that opens up new dreams and opportunities for individuals. She argues that education should be seen as part of the larger social and cultural context where family and popular culture have an active role in shaping the identities of youth. Individual interpretations of the meaning of education are constructed in interactions between the traditional and the modern, the local and the global culture. Based on her study of urban youth in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, Tranberg Hansen (2005) suggests that the structural (global, local, political, economical) dimensions interact with the experimental dimension that is constructed by social and cultural processes when youth are attaining adulthood. The urban youth in Tanzania and Mozambique studied by Helgesson (2006) see education as a strategy for improving life standards. Whether or not post-primary education is to become a viable strategy for youth is determined by economic and social capital, social class, gender and the tradition of education within the family combined with societal features like corruption, administration and the distribution of educational facilities. Barriers to education have been identified and their impact is annually monitored within the official Government records. According to the annual "Basic Statistics in Education" produced by the Tanzanian Ministry of Education (URT 2009), the major reasons for drop-out from secondary education include truancy, pregnancy and the lack of school needs[5]. Beyond these rough categories, qualitative studies on the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the reproductive health of teenage girls in Tanzania, Tumbo-Masabo & Liljeström (1994), and Dar es Salaam in particular (Khwaya Puja & Kassimoto 1990), discuss the linkages between social and cultural contexts and educational

attainment, emphasising pregnancy as a pertinent issue affecting girls' education both in rural and urban areas. These findings show that educational attainment is tied to a complex set of issues ranging from policy to socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. This study illustrates these issues from the perspective of the female students themselves. What do girls and young women with academic ambitions regard as factors that determine whether and how they will carry on with education?

This article depicts the social and cultural context where female secondary school students in the city of Dar es Salaam, are planning and preparing for the future. The aim of this depiction is to identify the social and cultural support available to female students, as they understand it. To better capture the variety of young people's perceptions beyond their immediate personal experience, this study adopted an open methodological approach. The enquiry was carried out to identify some of the key factors related to educational achievement, as seen by the students, through the assessment of challenges and opportunities in a form of role-play. The thematic analysis of the data and type stories (see Bleakley 2005) created from the data are presented here to illustrate the studied reality and to give female students voice. In conclusion, the experience of using empathy-based stories and the potential of the method will be discussed.

The definition and history of empathy-based narration

Empathy-based stories are short, imaginary writings composed according to an introductory script provided by the researcher (Eskola J. 1998). This form of passive role-play is used for acquiring information on the experiences and ideas embedded in narratives produced by individuals. A method originally developed in social psychology, passive role-playing (or non-active role-playing), also known as the method of empathy-based stories, has been developed as a modification of active role-playing for the purpose of studying the subject's interpretations of situations (Eskola J. 1997, Eskola A. 1988, Ginsburg 1979). Empathy-based stories are grounded in the narrative tradition,

emphasising the two-way relationship between the reality and the narrative which imitate each other (Suoranta 1996, Bruner 1987) and where narratives endow experience with meaning (Bruner 1986). Consequently, the narrator is considered someone who "shapes, constructs and performs the self, experience, and reality" (Chase 2005, 657). Research participants are viewed as competent members of their culture, having (tacit) knowledge of the rules that guide and evaluate situated actions (Ginsburg 1979). The ability of the empathy-based stories to capture the social and cultural engagement of the situation and the respondent (Eskola J. 1997) was the reason to apply this method to the Tanzanian social and cultural context.

When summarising his extensive experience of using and further developing the method in Finnish social science research, Eskola (1998) sees the value of empathy based stories in collecting contextual and timely bound cultural meanings and providing research participants with the opportunity to use their own voice. Empathy-based stories are not necessarily descriptions of reality, but possible stories about what may happen and what different things mean (Eskola J. 1998). The potential of the method is in finding new perspectives and inventing hypotheses. Empathy as a methodological tool can provide a context for a discovery with several paths that can be followed. Empathy-based method can spark people's imagination to make tacit knowledge visible (Eskola J. 1998)

Eskola (1998) considers the systematic analysis of triangulating empathy-based stories with other methods such as surveys and interviews as an important area for developing the method in the future. The method has been tested further in studies by Finnish researchers, who have used the method as a part of the methodological toolkit in their research projects (Mustonen 2006, Hyrkäs et al. 2005, Halttunen 2003). In addition to the objective of examining the social and cultural characteristics of educational attainment in Tanzania, this study contributes to the process of further exploring and testing the method in different contexts. Empathy-based stories was selected as a method for data gathering due to its great potential for mining rich data, a quality appreciated at the

initial stages of research conducted in a cultural context relatively new to the researcher. A more structured form of data gathering could have limited the enquiry to measurement and interpretations rising from the background and understanding of a Western researcher. This approach is supported by the research experiences of Judén Tupakka (2000) and Tranberg Hansen (2005) in Egypt and Zambia, where initially planned, more structured data collection methods proved to be futile and had to be replaced with open approaches to reach the realities of women and youth studied.

Based on their experiences in applying the method for small-scale international comparative studies, Simpura et al. (1990) and Mustonen (2006) regard empathy-based stories as a practical way of acquiring information in intercultural research. However, the interpretation of the data poses challenges when trying to comprehend the cultural meanings in the stories. Eskola (1998) also reminds us that empathy should be seen as a methodological tool for acquiring information, not as a research method or a methodology as such. Eskola's remark may have led writers (see Mustonen 2006, Halttunen 2003) to report on the technical application of the method without reflections on its applicability for different purposes or a critique of the method itself. In this article, a description and analysis of the experience of working with empathy-based stories will be presented with suggestions on alternative ways of using and further improving the method.

Data collection with female secondary school students in Dar es Salaam

Drawing from the previous studies on Tanzanian youth and contexts for meaning making (Stambach 2000, Helgesson 2006, Pollard and Filer 2007), I applied empathy-based stories at the initial stage of my research project on student perspectives to education. The empathy based stories served as an orientation for the research participants, 100 girls enrolled in lower secondary education institutions in Dar es Salaam. The students were selected from five secondary schools in the city area, which represented different types of schools in terms of attendance, performance and ownership. At the time of data collection in December 2008, the participants were aged between 16,

the official enrolment age for Form 3, and 26 and completing their third year of lower secondary education. They were preparing for the critical transition to upper secondary education or vocational training the following year. Writing the empathy-based stories provided a context for assessing the perception of individual opportunities and strategies in a situation where education may or may not be (directly) continued beyond the lower secondary level. The task of writing the empathy-based stories aimed at capturing the thinking base of the students by asking them to reflect on the meaning of education. More particularly, the writings were used to understand the specific research context and key issues, as defined by the girls themselves.

The introductory scripts used in this study were formulated to include the critical stages in education as identified in previous studies on the education of Tanzanian girls (Okkolin et al. 2010, Stambach 2000, Tumbo-Masabo and Liljeström 1994). Introductory scripts of two imagined peers and their transitions from lower secondary to higher secondary education were created to illustrate the significance of the coming transition and to stimulate the girls' thinking on the meaning of education. The scripts were written in collaboration with a Tanzanian research colleague who had thorough knowledge of the social and cultural context of the research participants in the urban reality of Dar es Salaam. The collection of empathy-based stories is a method originally developed to follow the logic of other more classical experiments (Eskola J. 1998). Changing some essential element in the introductory scripts is used to study the impact of variation. In the present study the major aim was to capture the girls' thinking about the coming transition from lower secondary (Ordinary level) to upper secondary (Advanced level) education, a critical transition stage especially for girls (Okkolin et al. 2010). Therefore, research participants were asked to reflect on the stories of their two imagined peers in different contexts with differing histories:

> a) Last year, Asha passed her O-level[6] exams with good grades and she has now started her studies in form 5. She is happy to have made it to form 5 because her parents have made a great effort to find the money[7] for her education. Asha thinks studying has now become more challenging and she is struggling to pass her exams this year. Her goal is to proceed all the way up to university and become a lawyer. Try to enter Asha's situation and write a story on how she will manage!

b) Roza finished O-level last year but her grades were unfortunately not high enough to enter A-level. When going to secondary school, she lived at her uncle's house in the city.[8] Now she has returned back to her parents' village, wondering how to start a life on her own.
Write a story to tell how Roza is going to continue from here!

The stories of the two imagined female peers aimed at stimulating the students' imagination to perceive, analyse and interpret issues related to educational attainment and to reflect on alternative strategies for overcoming obstacles in the educational paths. The introductory scripts were translated into Kiswahili, which is the first or second language of the students, the medium of instruction in primary school (for seven years) and the lingua franca in Dar es Salaam (see e.g. Tumbo-Masabo 1994). The respondents were asked to write their stories in Kiswahili. Drawing on Derbyshire (2002), Benson (2005) argues for the importance of mother tongue in collecting gender analytical information required for the improvements in girls' participation in education and the society at large. All respondents wrote stories about both girls, which resulted in a data corpus of 200 stories, between 40 and 80 words each, translated from Kiswahili to English. Two Tanzanian colleagues checked the translations and explained the cultural issues further.

The analysis was a data-driven process to identify the issues that secondary school students saw as impacting the educational attainment of girls. To observe the effect of variation on the introductory scripts regarding the context and success in final examinations, the two data sets were divided into two introductory scripts and the two sets of stories were coded separately. The data driven, open coding of both data sets was carried out to identify the variety of issues linked to the educational attainment discussed in the stories. The coded items included people and institutions, which were identified as "self, family, school". Also their attributes, for example: "to be reflective, to be patient" and concrete advice: "stay in town", were coded.

Afterwards, the two data sets were combined for a thematic analysis of the coded social and cultural issues. The open coding resulted in 590 items that were further grouped, categorised and eventually condensed to themes. The themes were developed by following the process of thematic analysis, as presented by Braun & Clarke (2006), to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes)

within the data with the aim to provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data. Here, thematic analysis is seen as a "*contextualist* method … which acknowledges the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the materials and other limits of *reality*" (Braun & Clarke 2006, 81). To gain a better understanding of the complexities of the social and cultural factors brought up by the students and to highlight the differences in the results in comparison to Western studies, the theme of parental support is further discussed, defined and refined through a qualitative content analysis.

To make full use of the rich data and to complement the thematic analysis, alternative ways of presenting the data were sought. In his assessment of narrative approaches, Bleakley (2005) suggests the creation of type stories "where the author provides a coherent, self-referencing, social-realist fiction enjoying the full use of narrative licence" (Bleakley 2005, 538). Type stories can be used to capture elements otherwise lost to structural analysis. To further utilise the potential of narratives to disclose the social reality, or the role/rule framework (Ginsburg 1979), type stories were created from the data to present the essential findings in a crystallised form, using the voice of the respondents.

The next section gives an overview of the data, followed by the analysis of the theme 'stay close to parents and have respect for them', and concludes with two type stories created on the basis of the whole data.

Overview of the data culled from empathy-based stories

"Being a girl, you should never allow yourself to be dragged around, but should steer your own life, then you will witness success." extract from a written empathy-based story

The stories written based on the introductory scripts revealed a range of items that were divided into 1) personal attributes and strategies and 2) social and cultural issues. The prevalence of the items mentioned were counted across both data sets. All the items will be presented and discussed briefly

to illustrate the participants' overall thinking about the factors that impact educational attainment. The distribution of the items coded in the data is presented in Table 1.

Table1. Coded items and their distribution in the data

	Student who transits to Form 5 (Asha)		Student who completes Form 4 and returns home (Roza)	
	Times mentioned	%	Times mentioned	%
Personal attributes and strategies *Examples: attitude, effort, responsibility*	218	69%	66	26%
Social and cultural issues *Examples: support from parents and extended family, peer support, school choice, religion*	99	31%	188	74%
Total	317	100%	254	100%

The data shows that students perceive educational attainment as a combination of personal attributes and social and cultural factors. Personal attributes and strategies include attitude, motivation and strategic action for better results. The social and cultural issues include peer support, study groups, parental support, extended family, educated seniors, living environment and religion. Social and cultural issues also refer to school related issues such as acquiring extra help from teachers, school selection, repeating classes and selecting alternative forms of education. The findings presented here repeat a picture essentially similar to what is known through previous studies on the social formation of future-orientation. The division into self-related, school-related and social and cultural factors in individual meaning making has also been seen in studies conducted in the UK by Pollard and Filer (2007).

According to Malmberg (1998), self-concept and future-orientation develop through integrating self-concepts across various contexts and situations. Beyond the rough division between the self and the social world, the data suggests that even though the respondents see themselves as the ones mainly responsible for their own educational attainment, the social and cultural context is

also seen as having a great impact on success in education. In particular, regarding the student who has transited from Form 4 to Form 5, personal effort and effective learning strategies are seen as the essential keys to success. In contrast, the stories written about a girl who did not continue education but returned home, emphasized the external, school related and other social and cultural factors in determining the continuation of education in the future. These stories also brought up issues within the social and cultural context that were seen as threats to success. This greatly expanded my scope of discovery in the analysis.

The identification of themes in student responses

To fulfil the overall objectives of analysing the perceived social and cultural determinants of success in transition from lower to upper secondary education, the analysis focuses on the girls' thoughts on social and cultural issues. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of relationships, sources of support and the impact of others on advancing in education. Therefore, after the issues brought up in the stories were grouped, the social and cultural issues coded in both data sets were analysed together in more detail through a thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006, 82), "a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set". Themes characterising the essential social and cultural elements that support education, as seen by the students, were formed from the data for further analysis. These ten themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.Themes describing social and cultural support and barriers to educational attainment

Theme	Source of support / barrier (in the last three themes)	Times mentioned in Asha's story (student who transits to Form 5)	Times mentioned in Roza's story (student who completes Form 4 and returns home)
Be close to peers	Fellow students	22	2
Get assistance from teachers	Teachers	11	3
Stay close to parents and have respect for them	Parents	14	19
Get assistance	Extended family	5	4
Get support from a senior	Educated seniors and professionals	8	4
God will help	Religion	12	5
Stay in the city	Living environment	-	5
Work and save money to continue schooling	Employment	-	29
Stay away from enticements	Undesirable groups	27	4
Don't marry	Marriage	-	5
Don't go back to the village	Living environment	-	5
	Total	99	85

The themes represent expressions of advice, respecting the writing style of the original stories. The sources of support and barriers to educational attainment are also explicated to clarify the themes. The stories portray the two imagined girls, Asha and Roza, struggling for a better future in very different situations. In general, Asha's continued success is seen to depend on staying close to supportive fellow students and parents, with additional support provided by religion, especially in maintaining high morale. At higher levels of education, further guidance and support should also be sought from teachers and educated seniors beyond family. In Asha's case, while considered as essential supporters, peers are also seen as the biggest threat to success due to the enticements they may represent. Many of the respondents were afraid of sexual harassment and the use of intoxicants in their peer groups. The socio-cultural landscape illustrated in Roza's stories is more varied and

brings up several issues beyond the immediate reality of a secondary school student in an urban environment. Being outside the school environment, Roza is seen as being less exposed to her peers, both in positive and negative terms. In times of struggle, parents are seen as the primary source of support. Most respondents consider Roza to be economically disadvantaged and getting funding for further studies is seen as problematic. The most frequently suggested solution for her was to find employment or establish a petty business in order to save money to continue her schooling. Staying in the village and getting married were seen as obstacles to continuing education.

The importance given to family in enabling education is particularly notable in my data. The theme of parental support, named as "Stay close to your parents and have respect for them" is discussed in further detail to describe and understand the social and cultural reality of Tanzanian girls, as told by them.

Analysis of familial relationships

> "Asha should be closely supported by her parents so as to reach her goals since parents are the pillar of life."

Relationships with family members, especially parents, are illustrated and discussed through extracts from the empathy-based stories. The family support in both data sets is analysed from perspectives (or sub-themes) of interdependence, self-initiative taken by a young female family member, financial dependence, respect and discipline and the value of support.

The stories reflect an interdependent relationship between family members. Girls see their role in building a better future for the whole family through education. Stories written about the girl who has returned home to the village reflect a sense of responsibility towards contributing to the family welfare by participating in income generation:

> "After my education, I would help my parents and remove them from the state of abject poverty in which they currently are, by supporting them."
> "It is her success that has brought about success to her parents"
> "She should work hand in hand with her parents in farming activities"

> "Roza should take a step in establishing various projects which can free up her life and that of her family."

A strong sense of responsibility is shown in the stories written by the students. Performing well is seen as a motivator for the family to continue supporting the education of their daughters:

> "She should speed up efforts in her studies so that her parents may continue releasing school fees and other monies she needs for her upkeep at school."
> "I would like to advise Asha to speed up effort in her studies because when the parents see that their child is doing well, they get encouraged to help the child."

The financial status of family provides the basic condition for continuing education. Respondents recognise the limited resources but very few accept lack of resources as a reason for discontinuing education. Where parents' resources are scarce, extended family is considered as an alternative source of support:

> "So many of us would like to be like in this case, but financial capabilities of our families are very limitedly small. --- Since where there is a will there is a way, your plans cannot break up."
> "Roza should seek for assistance from her paternal uncle in case her parents cannot afford to financially facilitate her further education."
> "She can also request her parents and close relatives to assist her financially."

In the context of being dependent on family support, respondents emphasise respect and discipline as requirements for success in carrying out personal plans.

> "She should observe discipline before her elders"
> "I again advise her to be respectful to her parents, since respect and obedience are blessings in her studies"
> "Further I would like to see that Asha would be patient, so that even when her parents will tell her that they do not have money at some point, all she can do is to listen to them."

While recognising their responsibilities as family members, and the respect, discipline and patience required from them, the respondents call for a great deal of self-initiative from Asha and Roza in relation to getting the support from the family.

> "Asha is expected to insist that her parents prepare her well for her future life."
> "I would like to advise Asha not to over-depend on her parents because they can die any time, so she better go and ask for assistance even from other people."
> "Roza should also sit down with her parents, and clearly explain to them her aim to continue with schooling."

Many stories also recognise the importance of parental attitudes towards education. While supportive parents and family members are appreciated, some stories disclose the continuous sensitisation that is required for continuous support.

> "Asha is lucky to have parents who take great initiatives with all their heart to ensure their child pursues her studies."
> "She (Roza) should sensitise her parents on the importance of education and the negative impacts of ignorance in order to make them positively hearted towards educating her"

The analysis of the theme of parental support reflects the social landscapes of secondary school girls, revealing the family relationship from the perspective of a female child with academic ambitions. Stories portray extended families as wide networks of supporting relationships. These relationships have to be respected, appreciated and well utilised in order for an individual to pursue her goals. Even though parents are considered as authorities, girls have rights that they need to claim. The financial status of the (extended) family goes hand in hand with continuing education. Students also see their role in contributing to the family income. Respondents clearly recognise their ability and potential in generating a better future for their families, in fact, many see it as a self-evident responsibility.

Type stories and their analysis

Type stories which combine the essential elements of the original stories written of Asha and Roza are presented to give the reader a glimpse of the world of teenage girls in Dar es Salaam.

> I advise my sister Asha to keep it up, because the level she has already achieved is a good one, since not all people have reached what she has attained. She should take note of her future prospects and plans and not focus on problems, but on studies, instead. Without studying hard, it is not possible to reach Form Five and Six and eventually the university. Again, great patience is needed in studying, as well as helping each other with the studies. If she can intensify her efforts in studies, she surely will achieve the objectives she has set for herself

> It is important to involve the like-minded colleagues whose goals are similar to those of hers. Whenever she experiences difficulties, like in comprehending during lessons in class, she should ask her teachers or fellow students. She should be staying close to her colleagues and join hands with them in different self-study groups, as well as exchanging ideas with different people. She ought to read many examination-relevant questions in every subject in order to widen her understanding and enable her to answer the questions that she will encounter in the concerned topic.

> Asha should strive with her studies since she is lucky to have parents who take great initiatives with all their heart to ensure their child pursues her studies. She needs to put God first and work actively hard while maintaining a lot of respect to all people including her parents and the community that surrounds her, for without respect, she cannot reach anywhere even if she tries hard. She should amplify her efforts into her studies, and God will help her. This will also encourage her parents to increase their efforts on raising funds for her studies.

She should also be aware of the alluring attractions from men, money, and others of the like who can only destroy her life and cause her to discontinue with her studies. If she has really opted for schooling, she will really study up to university – once you have stripped off your clothes for the water, you have got to bathe in it.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

I am very sorry for sister Roza. First, I advise her not to give up, instead if she is willing to continue with studies, she should then look for any alternative way – where there is a will there is a way. I can advise Roza that first she should not get weary, but instead sit with her parents and request them to try and find some money for her to enable her to continue and re-write her examinations. She could also go back to the town and request her uncle to find a school for her so that she re-writes the exams. In the event that she achieves no success, she should know that failing in school does not amount to total failure in life. With the level of education she has already got, she is capable of helping others, or can even seek for a college to study at. She then can still get a certificate-level course like teaching, nursing and other such courses! It is important because by staying in the village, she will just end up getting married.

Alternatively, she can seek for another business activity that she can undertake, in order to earn money for the subsistence and even to build herself up later on. Roza ought to take appropriate measures to accept and put up with her prevailing situation, and see how she can begin new life in the village by assisting each other with her parents.

I advise Roza not to give up since education has got no end. Because she has studied up to Form Four, she has got the goal or thinking capacity necessary to enable her to think over and manage to liberate herself from her underlying situation. If she believes in herself and her capability, then she should not hesitate to re-sit the Form Four examination for this will aid her in fulfilling her current dreams.

The type stories were created to provide further room for the respondents' interpretations concerning the actual story and its affective meanings. According to Bleakley (2005), analytical methods tend to lose the story and its emotional impact to abstract categorisations, often remaining descriptive while claiming explanatory value. The type stories were created based on extracts of the empathy-based stories, emphasising the themes that were formulated through the thematic analysis. The type stories are faithfully repeating the expressions used in the original stories, retaining the advisory but ever-optimistic tone present in most stories.

These narrative accounts portray competent young girls, capable of strategising and pursuing their personal goals. Life is not considered easy and the path ahead has many obstacles. Still, where there is a will, there is a way. Education is seen as worth all the struggle and effort. Similar to the accounts of Tanzanian and Mozambican youth studied by Helgesson (2006), often limited opportunities for formal employment were expressed even after completing higher levels of education, continued interest in education is related to a sense of self, of being educated and the

higher societal status of educated people. Or, as one of the research participants put it: "my education is everything to me: it is a father and mother, even a fiancé/husband of mine".

Discussion

This study has deepened the understanding of the nature of the particular elements of the reality of the research group and of the relationships of self, school and the social and cultural context. The thematic analysis reveals a social and cultural world different from the one exposed in Western studies, which emphasizes the impact of formal and informal social organisation within the school on individual development and educational achievement (Malmberg 1998, Pollard and Filer 2007). In the context of my study, parents, peers, extended family, educated seniors, teachers and religious groups form the social support structure for students. These relationships are seen to determine individual success to a large extent, and therefore they are cherished and respected accordingly. Girls currently living in the city consider traditional rural life as a barrier to accessing further education. Negative peer group influences and risk of pregnancy are seen as the major social and cultural factors threatening their success. The significance of family and living environment and, on the other hand, the risk of drop out due to pregnancy, has also been verified in studies by Helgesson (2006), and Stambach (2000). The present analysis describes the nature of these issues and their understanding in more detail through the girls' own views and interpretations. The role of religion has not been emphasised in the previous studies. Still, with the prevalence of religious attitudes and expressions in the data, religion cannot be overlooked as a significant source of support to young students struggling forward. Further analysis of individual meaning making and conceptions on the impact of the socio-cultural factors is required to understand the complexities of the reality of Tanzanian youth. The enriched view provided by this analysis can also orientate my focus on the essential issues to be studied further.

When assessing the added value of adopting a narrative approach in acquiring information, the reception of the empathy-based stories and the levels of empathy present in the stories should also be scrutinized. The writing task was received with enthusiasm by the secondary school students voluntarily participating in the research. The stories of Asha and Roza enabled the girls to think about future scenarios, and many respondents told the researcher this was the first time they had thought about the coming transition in such concrete terms. This alone could be an argument for adopting the approach when studying young people, especially girls, in a setting where they are in a marginalised position and where little room is left for them to express their thoughts and opinions. Empathy was clearly exercised when writing the stories. Empathy was echoed as the respondents' directly spoke to the imagined peers, took their perspective and even used the first person forms in writing. Again, many stories ended by explaining the personal plans of the girls and the personal commitments made which were inspired by Asha's and Roza's stories.

Enabling people to participate in research using their own language is an attempt to actively include the voices of the marginalised in research. According to Benson (2005), language is one of the principal mechanisms through with inequality is reproduced. The study has required me to cross several cultural and language barriers and to go through several translation processes. Despite the challenges, using Kiswahili allowed the girls to use rich language and cultural expressions in their stories which I believe increased the richness of the data.

Conclusion

Using empathy-based stories as a tool for qualitative inquiry is a process that greatly increases the understanding of the phenomena under study and also generates further ideas. Eskola (1994) describes the essence of the method of empathy-based stories as a texture. The texture and the research result is a narrative of why the introductory script was written as it was, followed by the script itself. The process is continued by narratives written by the girls, then by a narrative account

of how their written stories made the researcher change the initial story and how the whole process changed the researcher's conception of the phenomena approached through this method (Eskola A. 1994, 48). In my study, the process from developing the introductory scripts through analysing the stories and to developing them into type stories greatly increased my understanding of the contextual particularities of the research group and also generated ideas for the research project as a whole. In the future, it would be interesting to follow the paths of some individuals to further understand the role of social and cultural factors in actualised educational transitions, personal meaning making and the formulation of future-orientation.

Using empathy-based stories can serve as a strategy to give voice to people whose voice may not otherwise be heard in research. The ideas written in the stories managed to disclose issues that may not have been otherwise revealed by Tanzanian girls who are expected to be quiet and obedient and who are discouraged from expressing their own opinions. Here, the girls were free to express their feelings through 'the other girls'. The empathy-based stories can be viewed as informal stories that may include some revelations that are not present in the interviews where people speak about themselves. A comparison of the story data and the data from thematic interviews might provide more insights into the nature and value of the data collected with empathy-based stories.

Empathy-based stories can help to generate rich and meaningful data on shared cultural meanings. My discussion of the results in comparison with the findings of previous studies also supports the adoption of empathy-based stories as a relatively fast, boundary-spanning method of inquiry. When applying the method across cultures and using different languages, particular attention has to be given to the formulation of introductory scripts and the unfoldment of the cultural expressions used in the written stories. Special attention should also be given to presenting data in a way which respects the affective and explanatory power of the narratives. This experience

of the power and potential of empathy-based stories encourage us to further use of this method in

social research, also in unfamiliar cultural settings.

Notes

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[2] During the past decade, secondary education enrollment in Tanzania has increased rapidly, net enrollment in secondary education in 2008 being 26,1% (URT 2008). Still, transition rates from primary to secondary education are among the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa. Although almost equal in lower years of primary education, the proportion and performance of girls decreases while moving to the upper secondary education. For a recent review on gender and education in Tanzania, see Okkolin et. al. (2010).

[3] A joint research project of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland and the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, has been initiated to analyze the experiences and perceptions of girls and women, who have succeeded to continue their educational path up to secondary and higher education, on the meaning of education in their lives. For more information on the project, please visit the project website:
http://www.jyu.fi/ytk/laitokset/yfi/en/research/projects/educatedtanzania/intro.

[4] Qualitative research for social justice is widely discussed in a special issue of *International Journal for Qualitative Studies in Education* 22:3, May/Jun 2009. Application of critical research approaches in Africa have also been discussed by Chilisa (2005); Fritz, Henning and Swart (2008) and Toncy (2008) in this journal.

[5] The school needs include fees, books and other school-related costs. The term is used in the official education statistics in Tanzania as a category for reasons for non-attendance and drop-out.

[6] Ordinary -level refers to lower secondary education, Forms 1-4. Continuation to Advanced-level education
  (Forms 5-6) is determined by success in O-level final examinations.

[7] Resources are needed for covering school fees, textbooks, school uniforms etc., resulting in financial constraints being a constant problem for families who want to educate their children beyond primary education.

[8] The provision of education is still limited in rural areas. The extended family is a common source of support to rural youth.

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