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'I do not have the means to speak:' educating youth for citizenship in post-conflict Liberia

Laura Quaynor[a]

[a] Curriculum & Instruction, School of Education, University of
South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, SC, USA
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'I do not have the means to speak:' educating youth for citizenship in post-conflict Liberia

Laura Quaynor*

Curriculum & Instruction, School of Education, University of South Carolina Aiken, Aiken, SC, USA

Although policymakers stress the importance of education in promoting peace, little research examines the ways that schools prepare students affected by conflict to participate in the restoration of peace in their political community. Post-conflict societies experience severe challenges in strengthening political processes and social cohesion. This paper discusses citizenship education at a school run by a non-governmental organization near Monrovia, Liberia, examining the implemented curriculum in an 8th grade civics classroom. The paper details the ways that young people expressed civic critiques within the classroom, and provides a counterstory to narratives of harsh and violent educational environments in the region. This classroom was a space where students and their teacher engaged in talk about contentious issues: students discussed corruption and injustice, and highlighted the relationship between economic and political power. I argue that if the goal of education is to produce engaged, effective citizens, teachers should have pedagogic support to confront the differences between the implemented curriculum and students' lived experiences. Peace education in such contexts must include equipping students to seek justice. Furthermore, because possibilities for civic education are embedded in students' local and national contexts, current global civic education initiatives must be adaptive to local realities.

Keywords: NGO's; Liberia; civic education; citizenship; post-conflict

Introduction

A central goal of the educational experience worldwide is to provide schooling that helps youth develop the tools to recognize and solve problems in their society (Banks 2008; Morrell 2008). With the recent international policy focus on Education for All, the United Nations and other international organizations encourage the promotion of democratic citizenship in education, especially in post-conflict environments (Machel 1996; UNESCO 2008). At the same time, scholars have documented concerns over the ways that education can serve to either promote or impede efforts for peace in post-conflict environments (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Gallagher 2005; Hromadžić 2008).

Post-conflict settings pose a special challenge and opportunity for civic education (Abdi, Ellis, and Shizha 2005); often, the government structure of the country has changed, altering the factual content of civics courses. Moreover, schools need to

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*Email: lauraq@usca.edu

socialize students for peaceful decision-making in the context of recent violent conflict. In addition, teachers and students have been personally affected by conflict, requiring that many continue to negotiate the lingering effects of traumatic stress in their daily lives (Braga, Mello, and Fiks 2012; Kia-Keating and Ellis 2007; Yehuda and Bierer 2008).

Despite the importance of civic education in post-conflict contexts, little research explains how teachers and students grapple with civic education in classrooms in post-conflict African nations (Quaynor 2012). With 44% of the population under the age of 14 in Liberia (LISGIS 2011), the ways that young people understand and enact citizenship will shape the nascent peace in this West African democracy (Abdi, Ellis, and Shizha 2005; Dorman, Hammett, and Nugent 2007). Citizenship education for youth in Liberia is of particular importance as youth were heavily involved in the recent conflict (Bohrer 1999; Moran 2006; Utas 2003). This article describes a study of the intended and implemented curriculum in an eighth-grade civics classroom in Liberia, providing an important glimpse into the ways that one teacher and his students understood the particular challenges of citizenship in their own lives. The findings shared in this paper illustrate that in Liberia, peace education cannot be divorced from equipping students with the tools to advocate for justice within their society. In addition, I note that those who work to implement education for peace, citizenship, and human rights must understand the civic culture of the country in which they work. Below, I provide an overview of the Liberian context and a brief review of the existing literature on citizenship education in post-conflict contexts before sharing the results of this study.

The origins of citizenship in Liberia

Liberia, a nation formally founded by African-Americans in 1847, is unique in West Africa in its origin and development. The American Colonization Society, with free black members, colonized the area that would become the independent nation of Liberia in the early 1820s (Bay 2000). This history is unlike that of other countries in West Africa that were colonized by European powers and gained nationhood status after independence movements in the late 1950s to early 1970s (Moran 2006). Initially, Americo-Liberian settlers did not integrate with the local inhabitants but considered themselves to be 'the means of introducing civilization and religion among the barbarous nations of this country' (Liebenow 1987, 153).The founding constitution of Liberia specifically excluded tribal persons from citizenship; however, they were nonetheless required to pay taxes to the national government (Cassell 1970; Liebenow 1987; Saigbe Boley 1984; Shick 1980).

Americo-Liberians composed five percent of the population of Liberia but held control of the government from 1847 to 1980 (Bateman et al. 2000). This government was highly centralized and emphasized presidential sovereignty, both of which have been identified as key factors in the Liberian crisis (Sawyer 2005). In 1980, Samuel Doe, an indigenous Liberian, established an authoritarian regime which dissolved into conflict when Charles Taylor led forces to invade Nimba County in the northwest of the country (Scott 1998). This invasion began 14 years of devastating conflict, during which hundreds of thousands were killed (BBC 2013). After a peace accord was signed in 2003, elections were held in 2005, and Ellen Sirleaf Johnson, a World Bank economist of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian descent, was elected president (BBC 2013).

Citizenship education in African contexts

Many previous studies on citizenship education in African countries suggest that there is a tendency to avoid the topic of conflict within classrooms in order to promote national unity (Enslin and Divala 2008; Freedman et al. 2008; Groth 2006; Quaynor 2012). Such a widespread focus on patriotic citizenship education (Waghid 2009) raises the concern that students may not learn to engage in deliberative discussions on controversial issues, a skill necessary for negotiating peace in a democracy and related to positive civic outcomes in international studies of civic education (Hahn 1998; Hess 2009; Torney-Purta, Schwille, and Amadeo 1999). Patriotic constructions of citizenship may compromise the abilities of students to advocate for their own rights as well as wider social justice in local, national, and global contexts (Enslin and Divala 2008). A concern specific to post-conflict environments is that if disputes occurring naturally in a community are suppressed rather than managed, violent conflict can flare up again (Blair, Blattman, and Hartman 2011).

Researchers who study the roles of teachers in post-conflict and African societies stress the transformative but troublesome nature of this position (Freedman et al. 2008; Kirk 2004; Kubow 2007; Ndura 2006). At the same time that some scholars advocate for the ability of teachers to act as social activists to promote peace and critical consciousness (Johnson 2007; Kirk 2004; Ndura 2006; Yogev 2013), an empirical study from Rwanda suggests that teachers may prefer to focus on ensuring a single, 'true,' classroom narrative in order to prevent future conflict (Freedman et al. 2008). In contrast, teachers in South Africa and Kenya reported valuing active participation in society and equality (Kubow 2007). This body of work suggests that teachers' understandings of democracy among African countries vary widely, and that a country's history of conflict can be a powerful force in shaping teacher understandings. Although scholarship exists on civic education in post-conflict Rwanda, no reports discuss how the intended curriculum aligns with teacher and student classroom discourse on citizenship in any post-conflict African environments. That is, policy documents exist without reports on what these policies mean for students in classrooms. This study was designed to begin to understand what citizenship education is, and how it is enacted, in post-conflict Liberia.

Schooling and citizenship for Liberian youth

Existing research on school experiences and civic attitudes among young people in Liberia shows that students value school and exhibit civic engagement. However, this engagement exists in schooling environments where reports of violence, sexual harassment, and corruption are widespread (Atwood et al. 2011; Dahn 2008; Ekeanyanwu and Ogbu 2006; Sharkey 2008; Stromquist et al. 2013). Teachers echo students' positive sentiments toward schooling, relating education to future community development (Winthrop and Kirk 2008).

Anthropologists Bohrer (1999) and Utas (2003) underlined the political engagement of Liberian youth through ethnographies of Liberian refugees and youth outside of school, and emphasized that both populations were aware of their theoretical rights as global citizens. Both students and undereducated, unemployed youth previously excluded from access to political power became key political actors during the war (Diouf 2003), and critiques of post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia include the need to integrate youth into civil society (Ballah 2012; Maclay and Özerdem 2010).

Overall, this scholarship recognizes Liberian youth as powerful and intentional political actors.

It is clear that young Liberians, with or without schools, have been engaged in ideas of citizenship and participation, and many see schooling as an important part of preparation for their future. However, reports suggest that schools are not always places where young people experience empowering education, as advocated by scholars and policy-makers. Citizenship education is the official space in which political participation and schooling, both reportedly valued by youth in Liberia, intersect. Thus, it is key to understand what the possibilities are for such a space, with rich potential for developing critical citizens. By focusing on civic education, this study elevates the intersection of youth as political actors and the school as a space for the development of citizens.

A case study in greater Monrovia

This project is a vertical case study (Vavrus and Bartlett 2006), which situates definitions of citizenship and civic education within cultural, historical, and political contexts. To explore the phenomenon of education for citizenship in urban Liberia, I analyzed *Liberian Civics* by Joseph Guannu (2004), the textbook used in the civics classroom under study, completed three semi-structured interviews (Rubin and Rubin 1995) with an eighth-grade civics teacher, and conducted five observations (Dewalt and Dewalt 2002) of the eighth-grade classroom over the course of one month. The interview protocol is described in more detail in Appendix 1, and the textbook studied is used throughout Liberian schools as the standard civics text. Appendix 2 provides more information about the data analysis process. I refrained from interviewing students in this work in order to focus on the context and form of naturally occurring interactions (Briggs 1986) and respect the status of war-affected minors as a vulnerable population (Boyden 2000; Caballero 2002).

The following research questions guided the case study: (1) What are students expected to know and believe about citizenship and democracy in post-conflict Liberia? (Intended curriculum); (2) How do teachers and students talk about citizenship and democracy in the civics classroom? (Implemented curriculum). Conducted in May–June 2009, this study took place in the Paynesville area of Greater Monrovia, a region that is home to over 30% of Liberia's population (LISGIS 2011). This study focused on one school in order to provide a window into the ways students in this context discussed citizenship; the single case study is intended to detail the contours of a phenomenon in one context (Merriam 2009). As a case study (Merriam 2009), the results of this study are not generalizable to all Liberian classrooms, but provide detailed information about the possibilities of civic education in this context.

Participants

Participants in this study included the teacher and 33 students of the one eighth-grade civics class at the Lisa Bayer School (LBS[1]), a school run by a local non-governmental organization (NGO). Pastor John, the teacher, was the social studies and civics teacher for fourth to eighth grades at the school, and had 21 years of experience in the classroom. Having begun teaching elementary students upon his graduation from high school, Pastor John had attended teacher training provided by the International Rescue Committee during the Liberian war while he was a refugee

in Guinea. A grandparent of students who attended the school, he was also an assistant pastor at a nearby gospel church. Students in his eighth-grade classroom ranged from 15 to 31 years of age, and a number were also parents of young children. Students had varying experiences with conflict and displacement: some had been refugees in Ghana or Guinea, and others had lived in Monrovia throughout the conflict. Most had lost family members in the conflict. I did not ask if any had been active combatants due to the desire to respect students' privacy and avoid retraumatization (Boyden 2000; Caballero 2002).

Site

LBS opened in 2008 and was registered with the national government, using the same curriculum as government schools; students in high school registered for and took the West African Examination Council exams at the end of their studies. At least 30% of students in Liberia during this time attended non-governmental school such as LBS, although most of these schools charged higher fees (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2009). This school had very little contact with international initiatives, although any large-scale changes to the government-approved curriculum would have been adopted by teachers at LBS as well.

Theoretical framework

This study focuses on a contemporary secondary school, a type of institution created in Liberia during the colonial period, in contrast to indigenous apprenticeship systems and Sande or Poro societies (Cassell 1970; Lancy 1996). To recognize the roots of this institution in the colonial enterprise, this study drew on postcolonial theory to ground interview and observation guides and to interpret the findings. As a framework developed by intellectuals from formerly colonized countries, postcolonial theory complicates unidimensional ways of understanding the identity and agency of peoples in postcolonial states (Babha 1994; Said 1978; Spivak 1988; Wa Thiong'o 1986). This theoretical framework thus requires an examination of the concepts of 'democracy' and 'citizenship.'

The danger of using conceptions of citizenship education based in Western political thought is that citizenship is a highly contextual concept (Kubow 2007). The Western liberal conception of the citizen arose with the development of capitalism; thus, the role of democracy was to safeguard property rights and individual liberties (Barber 2003). There is also concern that Western conceptions of citizenship might highlight holding free and fair elections over insuring proportional representation or the establishment of a healthy civil society (Chauvet and Collier 2009; Kelley 2012; Wonkeryor et al. 2000). However, indigenous Liberian conceptions of democracy focus on individual and communal empowerment and equity (Wonkeryor et al. 2000).

Below, I report findings highlighting the ways that the curriculum, the teacher, and his students understood democracy within this context, which included both liberal Western and indigenous conceptions of rights. A description of the intended and implemented curriculum in the focal classroom is followed by an analysis of the democratic discourses and postcolonial critique that characterized this civics education classroom. The study concludes that students have rich civic experiences, and that teachers should be supported in equipping students with the skills to effect

change when they see the ideals of the textbook at odds with the realities of daily life. Educating students for peace thus means educating students to fight inequalities they see in their society through non-violent means.

Teacher-centered pedagogy and an open classroom climate

Teachers and students talked about citizenship and democracy extensively in this classroom, which was characterized by a positive and open classroom climate. When students mentioned issues that were relevant to them or over which there was disagreement, Pastor John addressed the concern or the controversy rather than avoiding it. However, he used the textbook to provide students with a right answer if he believed it existed, rather than encouraging disagreement or full discussion of the issues.

The findings from the curricular analysis align with the participatory nature of classroom discourse discussed later in this section. Just as the textbook in this study directly addresses the causes of the Liberian conflict, classroom discourse allowed students to directly ask about and discuss difficult issues. It is possible that the focus in the textbook on the responsibilities of the government to its citizens allowed students to detect and critique the times when these responsibilities went unfulfilled.

Notably for a textbook in a post-conflict society (Quaynor 2012), the textbook author overtly states that students should learn about the government structure and past injustices in order to be prepared to solve present-day issues, similar to the goal of counter socialization advocated by Engle and Ochoa (1988). The author, Joseph Saye Guannu (2004), states in the textbook introduction,

> I decided to write with the hope that a correct knowledge of the rights and duties of citizens acquired from civics and complemented by correct knowledge of the failures and achievements of the state … will assist the nation's youths to grow and develop into more useful citizens. (vii)

Ending in 2004, the recent conflict may be part of the reason for highlighting historical problems and current responsibilities of the state. Guannu (2004) connects the need for citizenship education with the recent war, saying 'Perhaps a basic knowledge of civics would have helped to reduce the level of destruction of lives and properties that attended the conflict' (vii). As part of this emphasis on learning from past mistakes, the textbook explicitly addresses the causes of conflict in Liberia. This aspect differs from the findings from other scholarship related to curriculum in post-conflict societies, which emphasize that civics curricula tended to avoid topics related to societal conflict (Freedman et al. 2008; Mátrai 2002; Niens and Chastenay 2008). Despite the honest engagement in the injustices present in Liberian society, the textbook used by the teacher in my study did not provide students the opportunity to learn how to use historical evidence to construct alternate histories (Barton 2011). Rather, it provided stories of both positive and troubling episodes in national history, not shying away from controversial episodes in history, but also not presenting multiple viewpoints on these episodes.

Just as the textbook in this study did not avoid controversial issues, classroom discourse allowed students to engage with the subject material and connect it to current political debates. Three features that characterized the pedagogy and climate included call and response techniques, positive camaraderie, and consistent personal connections. The most evident pedagogic feature of the lessons was the structured

'call and response' pattern used by Pastor John, a structure widely documented in African and African-American schools and churches (Noment 2005). A typical class would involve this call and response pattern for half of the period, interspersed with student questions and discussion which filled the other half. After writing notes on the board, Pastor John would read them, pose questions, and expect a choral response. He would ask, for example: 'The legislature is composed of what?' and students would answer, 'Two houses.' 'The what?' 'Senate and house of representatives.' He then typically explained the notes the students had just read out, making personal connections to the material, and student would ask questions. When Pastor John seemed satisfied that the students had addressed certain points, he returned to reading the notes in the 'call and response' pattern. Although the class did not engage in reflective debates, it was not an authoritarian system because students seemed comfortable questioning and challenging their teacher and their peers.

In this classroom, there was evidence of an amicable relationship between the teacher and students and a positive classroom climate. Although much of the supporting research has been conducted in US classrooms, positive relationships and interactions among teachers and students in classroom are consistently associated with enhanced student motivation, engagement, and achievement (Frick 2010; Jennings and Greenberg 2009; Martin and Dowson 2009; Ryan and Patrick 2001). At one point, when the eighth grade was scheduled to have geography class but the geography teacher was absent, the students came to find Pastor John and asked him to teach a lesson. In addition, I often witnessed both students and staff approaching Pastor John to ask him to help settle disputes. Within the class period, there were multiple examples of democratic camaraderie. When Pastor John interrupted a female student, Fatima, who was explaining her point to another student, she protested; 'I was speaking! You crossed me.' Pastor John smiled back to class laughter, and responded 'Hey! You yourself you are [a] politician.'

Personal connections to the material were also common during lessons. Both Pastor John and the students connected the course material to their lived experiences, but Pastor John was more likely to use his connections to involve the students in thinking. While teaching about the legislative process, Pastor John talked about the current budget before the legislative body, which proposed to raise the salary of civil servants in the government to $100 a month from $70. He shared that he used to work for the Ministry of Education during the regime of Charles Taylor, the Liberian president from 1997 to 2003 (Moran 2006), when his salary was less than 1000 Liberian dollars a month (equal to US$20). He then took the students through a breakdown of the costs associated with working and running a household, while a female student used her cell phone to convert a salary paid in United States dollars (the currency of government salaries) to Liberian dollars (the currency of daily costs). During this episode, students raised the issues of needing money to pay for children's school fees, another topic relevant to the teacher and students, many of whom attended this particular school because no one in their family could pay school fees.

The teacher in this study, Pastor John, fostered a positive environment for students and allowed students to talk about controversial topics in the classroom, unlike teachers in other post-conflict and African contexts (Freedman et al. 2008; Koshmanova and Ravchyna 2008; Sigauke 2011; Ukpokodu 1997). Similar to teachers in Dull's (2006) study of social studies teachers in Ghana, his pedagogical style used personal connections to present the content to the students. This facet of

his instruction indicates that not all teachers are afraid of controversial topics in post-conflict societies. Whether this is due to personal style, influence of international discourse about human rights and freedom of speech, local context, or other factors is an interesting topic for further research.

The type of conversations around controversial issues both resembled and differed from a structured discussion. Though Pastor John provided space in the classroom for students to critique the current and past government and speak about issues over which they disagreed, lessons did not focus around topics of shared inquiry and he did not teach *for* discussion (Hess 2009). He did expect students to exchange or examine views, practices which Hess (2009) identified as hallmarks of classroom discussion.

The classroom climate I observed involved mutual respect between students and teachers. The classroom and school were sometimes loud, vibrant spaces; however, this noise was not connected to student punishment but curricular engagement. This facet provides a counter story to the reports from schools in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Sharkey 2008; Winthrop and Kirk 2008), which detailed negative experiences in schools, with teachers harshly punishing and humiliating students. It also contrasts with descriptions of citizenship education in South Africa in which students are expected to learn to be respectful but are not themselves respected (Hammett and Staeheli 2011).

In recent large-scale studies of civic education, student identification of an open classroom climate has consistently shown associations with strong civic knowledge and high levels of civic engagement (Hahn 1998; Homana, Barber, and Torney-Purta 2006; Schulz et al. 2010; Torney-Purta et al. 2001). Although in at least one post-conflict context, the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom had a negative relationship with democratic climate (Mapiasse 2007), this study found that the classroom was open to both student voices and the discussion of controversial issues. This may reflect a cultural difference between settings, but provides evidence that a post-conflict environment does not preclude an open classroom climate coexisting with the discussion of controversial issues.

Despite Pastor John's ability to create a warm and engaging classroom climate, classroom activities were limited, consisting mostly of note taking, lecture, and anecdotal conversations. Participatory activities, identified by Finkel and Ernst (2005) as important for the development of democratic skills and values in the South African context, were not evident during my study. The lack of role-playing, simulations, and group projects may be because of the limited resources at the school; teachers at LBS did not have access to the sustained external training and materials researchers suggest are necessary for such pedagogy (Lattimer and Kelly 2013). In spite of these limitations, my observations indicate that students had opportunity to engage in discussions that contributed to their civic engagement.

Citizenship education as experienced in this classroom included teacher-centered pedagogy, and an open classroom climate, providing opportunities for students to learn about rights and justice, key components of peace education (Harris 2008). In addition, education in this classroom allows for a focus on agency, a necessary element of critical approaches to peace education (Bajaj and Chiu 2009; Shirazi 2011). However, it stops short of teaching students skills and processes for conflict resolution, also key for peace education in post-conflict societies (Bajaj 2010; Harris 2008).

Though Pastor John is still teaching at LBS, he told me that if he had the resources, he would return to university to earn a business degree and seek more profitable employment. As he had taught for 25 years, I was surprised at this fact. His desire to leave the classroom points to the challenge of retaining teachers when other fields have more potential for economic rewards (Powell 2007). In Liberia as elsewhere, dedicated teachers must be provided with a living, reliable wage as an incentive to keep talented teachers working with students. Although this issue is not central to the creation of an open classroom climate, any efforts to implement teacher training that do not address the sustainability of the position will be weakened.

Students engaged in critiques of power

Overall, the pedagogy and climate of the classroom allowed for a rich and spontaneous discussion of citizenship and democracy among the teacher and the students. Both noted the differences between citizenship as described in the textbook, and citizenship as they experienced it in their daily lives. Though national citizenship, state allegiance, and constitutionalism (Bahmueller 1991) were emphasized by the teacher, most student comments centered around contested aspects of national citizenship and threats to the current functioning of democracy in Liberia. Students' critiques focused on limits to their power as citizens and the failure of government to live up to politicians' promises, as discussed in the following paragraphs. These critiques were all related to current political issues rather than historical debates.

Having the means to speak

During conversations in the classroom, students emphasized that they felt political rights were limited by a lack of economic power. After students raised the issue of government corruption, Pastor John tried to push the students to engage as citizens, reminding them of their freedom of speech. One male student, Peter, responded, 'I can't challenge them [politicians]. My ma is broke and my pa is broke.' A female student, Fatima, added,

> Yes – for me because I do not have the means to speak if I speak against someone with money their money will send me to Salt Beach [a prison] for my lifetime. Not just for half time but for my lifetime.

The teacher continued the discussion, asking 'are you saying the rights of the Liberians are being buried?' Fatima replied 'Exactly so. I pray that God will help me graduate from this school I will be someone I will be politician and I will speak out.' Other students listened carefully, adding into the exchange as it continued through the end of the class period. Before class ended, Pastor John concluded, 'that is to say your rights have been infringed,' and Fatima replied, 'Our rights have been buried under the deepest part of the grave.'

In another lesson, Pastor John read information about the importance of educated citizens to his notes, saying 'If a citizen is incorrectly informed, it is a threat to the society. They say a citizen should know their rights. At the age of 18, you have your rights.' A student responded, 'If I have the chance.' 'What chance do you need?' queried the teacher. 'I need money' the student replied. Another student added, 'without it … you are zero.'

From Fatima, Peter, and their classmates' viewpoints, economic power was equal to political power. Lacking economic power, they said they were politically powerless to the extent that they were citizens without access to their basic rights. Thus, the freedom of speech could not practically exist without the means to speak. This intersection between financial means and political agency is seen in the political participation of adults in other African contexts, where poorer populations have more access to informal political networks than ability to participate in official democratic spaces (Bratton 2006).

Within Liberia, one critique of the modern form of democracy is that because of the primacy of the individual vote, dissenting minorities have fewer protections of association. In contrast to a discourse of elections as an exercise in personal freedom, popular consciousness in Liberia includes the idea of violence to suppress individual voices. As individuals tried to consolidate support in preparation for a political campaign, there were documented reports of ritual killings, particularly in Maryland County (Moran 2006). In such cases, Moran argues that representational politics involves the symbolic and real violence of appropriating the voices of others. Thus, the student voices discussed above are speaking in a context where the means to speak and vote have been suppressed by those in power. Although this may happen in all democratic contexts, the threat of violence in popular memory can shape the extent to which individuals actually feel free to exercise their rights.

At multiple points in the classroom, different students stated that they felt they could not take advantage of their rights as citizens because of their limited economic status. Most often, students connected this restriction with the freedom of speech. In the context of Liberia, this meant not only the means to make one's voice heard, but also the means to protect oneself from violent repercussions from speaking one's mind.

The conflation of access to capital with the freedom of speech is not unknown either in Liberia or in other national contexts. For example, this issue is raised in the critiques of the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision in the United States, in which the court ruled that the right to the freedom of speech indicated that the government could not restrict political spending by corporate entities (Liptak 2010). The court thus found that the right to amplify a corporate or individual voice via expensive media campaigns is included in the right to speak. Although the US and Liberian contexts vary widely, the tension remains the same: if one's voice requires substantial economic capital to be heard or defended from attack, to what extent is speech free?

In Liberia, economic realities limited students' other rights, such as the right to an education and the right to compete for employment. Free public education was not a reality, and other youth who did not attend school had to work in order to support their families and themselves. The tension between stated rights and reality was common in the post-conflict context; rhetoric around human rights was common on the radio and in the media, yet it was clear that the government did not have the resources to provide services such as the right to education, police responses, or clean water.

Corruption and promises unfulfilled

Although both rights and responsibilities were delineated in the textbook, classroom discussion focused more on the government's responsibilities to citizens that were

not being fulfilled than the rights or responsibilities of citizens. Class discussions, mostly instigated by students, focused mainly on what the textbook called threats to democracy: corruption, the lack of good governance, and lack of equal and fair representation. The consistent pattern was that as the teacher taught about the structure and function of the government, students noted ways that it did not operate as described.

The day that Pastor John was lecturing on the legislative branch of the government, students began to complain about corruption. Responding to these statements, Pastor John asked the students about their representatives, asking them 'Why do you vote them into office?' A student replied 'to speak on behalf of their people.' 'Are they doing it?' Pastor John probed further, repeating the question five times. Some students replied yes, some no, and Pastor John asked them to raise their hands: 'Who says yes? Who says no?' At least 10 students raised their hands to indicate no, while four indicated yes, and others did not vote. Pastor John then gave notes and lectured on why people elected representatives, and asked students, 'All these things that are listed, are the senators and representatives doing them? You said no. So now since you are saying no, they are not spending on behalf of you, what are they doing?'

In the above discussion, students were quick to recognize that the government did not work as it was outlined in their textbook. Rather than deny this opinion, Pastor John positioned students as citizens with valid concerns, and himself noted structural barriers to the elimination of corruption. As mentioned above, when he discussed the current government budget being considered by the legislature, Pastor John led the students in analysis of government workers' salaries and expenses. Together they determined that after subtracting commuting expenses, a worker would be left with only $12 US Dollars in take home pay. Pastor John asked the students 'What's the essence of you making that $70? That's why corruption will not finish. Can you even buy a bag of rice?' Students responded resoundingly 'No,' with James, a male student, noting that in this case 'your children won't eat.'

Students as active citizens

In addition to the emphasis on the need for citizens to be informed, both the textbook and the teacher stressed more active than passive aspects of citizenship. These aspects included the belief that citizens should be educated, specifically because they needed to be able to vote and hold their government accountable. They should also value national unity and understand the structure of the government, in order to participate effectively. Rather than focusing solely on the responsibilities of citizens, the textbook and teacher cataloged the variety of responsibilities that members of the government have to their constituents. These duties included providing a basic infrastructure of roads, hospitals, schools, electricity, and clean water. Tables 1–3 detail the right and responsibilities of citizens and the government mentioned in the textbook, as well as their frequency.

Underlying the discussion between the teacher and students in the classroom, as well as the teacher's responses during his interview, was an assumption that students were not only future but current civic actors. This assumption aligns with the Liberian context, in which student activism is not unusual: in the years since the study, secondary students in the Monrovia area have demonstrated multiple times to protest school conditions and teacher absenteeism (Abalo 2011; Hanson 2012;

Table 1. Frequency of rights of citizens listed in the textbook.

Right	Frequency
Vote	7
Association and assembly	7
Freedom of speech	6
Life	5
Right to property	4
Participation in government	3
Freedom of the press	3
Right to information/education	3
Right to worship	2
Right to run for office	2
Right to compete in business/for employment	2
Right to residence and freedom of movement	2
Rights of criminals/due process	2
Right to privacy	2
Right to representation	1
Academic freedom	1
Right to [personal] security	1
Right to sue for the violation of rights by individuals or the government	1
Right to earn a living	1
Right to buy and sell	1
Freedom from slavery/forced labor	1
Equality before the law	1

Table 2. Frequency of responsibilities of citizens listed in textbook.

Responsibility	Frequency
Vote	9
Be informed/educated	6
Serve/assist government	4
Pay taxes	4
Respect government property	2
Promote government	2
Follow laws	1

Table 3. Frequency of government responsibilities to citizens mentioned in textbook.

Government responsibility	Frequency
Provide (civic) education	7
Protect rights	6
Protect/provide for families	3
Represent all citizens	1
Regulate business	1
Manage limited resources	1
Organize free and fair elections	1
Respond to the needs of citizens	1

Weedee and Johnson 2011). As members of the classroom, students engaged in civic critiques at the same time that they indicated their civic engagement.

Pastor John and the students themselves, despite frustration with the government, continually discussed their roles and responsibilities as part of the nation. The teacher emphasized that educating students about their responsibility to be informed voters would affect his own life. In an interview, he referred to the recent election in 2005 in which George Weah, an international football star with what he saw as insufficient education and political experience was a serious contender for the presidency.

> And the teenagers – those who play football – they were in favor of what? George Weah. They were not thinking about who was going to develop the country … They were only thinking about the soccer legend in the race … But who knows? If he were elected what would he do?

Pastor John's viewpoint was evident in class when he emphasized students' identities as citizens. When one student expressed that he was not a citizen because he didn't have a passport, Pastor John clarified, 'No! They only reason I have passport is so I can travel … citizens who are not born here, they give them paper, but it's not a passport.' In another instance, Pastor John underlined students' role in a democracy, asking them, 'Without you there will be no what? Government.' When a female student said she would not vote in the next election because 'they [those in power] already know who they want,' another student challenged her, saying 'the government is the society … if you don't [vote] you will never get access.'

Power and postcolonialism

Other evidence from post-conflict contexts indicates that the shifting and sensitive power dynamics evident after violence have a considerable effect on citizenship education (Quaynor 2012). Students and teachers in such societies may have difficulty trusting those from other ethnic groups, politicians, the use of discussing controversial issues, and the political process. Although such a critical view of power was evident in this study, students whose distrust bordered on cynicism were challenged by other students and their teacher to continue to invest themselves in the common national future.

The postcolonial critique of democracy as a protection of individual rights versus a communal enterprise was evident in the students' classroom discussions. The teacher and students critiqued both the transparency and structure of elections. Charles, a male student, stated, 'The voting was like this. After many years of sorrow and tears, people were constrained and wanted peace. You wanted real choice but there was pressure to vote for this person …' Pastor John agreed and alluded to the possibility of electoral fraud, stating that 'After the voting, it took a long time before the result came … when they were doing the counting I was not there.'

Fatima also critiqued the ways that politicians manipulated the electoral system, stating 'the authority is in the people when the election is taking place. They [politicians] will tell you sweet sweet things.' Pastor John replied 'It is true all that you are saying. Right after the election, all promises are done.' The tendency of politicians to make empty promises during campaigns is by no means exclusive to Liberia. In this case, both Fatima and Pastor John recognized that democracy based

only on voting was a hollow promise – a system that neither addressed equity nor protected the freedom of speech.

Because of the colonial origin of the state and the devastation of the economy during the war, the government in Liberia controls a large portion of the national economy. As mentioned above, this means that the results of elections matter in very personal and immediate ways to students. At the same time that this drives civic engagement, it can also restrict the avenues for such engagement that are available to students. A central question that arises from this student and teacher critique is how to assist students in promoting communal accountability when the government is the main controller of capital within a country.

As noted by civic organizers from King (1964) to Roy (2004), justice is an essential component of peace. Any attempt to educate students for peace in a post-conflict nation without attending to issues of justice cannot hold (Zembylas and Bekerman 2013). At the same time that students were learning about citizenship, they were attentive to current issues of justice within the government and society at large. The underlying focus of both the teacher and students on this issue is critical: in case of post-conflict nations, attention to justice is necessary for the management of conflict and construction of peace.

Civic education in context

This level of political engagement may be related to the rich experiences of the recent conflict. For example, students related American citizenship to status and power, because during the war, they witnessed the American embassy evacuate ethnic Liberians who held American citizenship. In contrast, students in Groth's (2006) study in peaceful Ghana associated citizenship not with voting or power but with actions they could take in their local community to contribute to development. In another context students in Sigauke's (2012) study of youth attitudes in Zimbabwe showed that although students had high levels of civic knowledge, low levels of students expected to participate in political activities as adults. Sigauke (2012) posited that the restrictive political environment in Zimbabwe was responsible for this mismatch between knowledge and action.

Through comparisons between this work and other research, it is clear that civic education practices are shaped and constrained by the political and economic context of the countries in which they take place (Antal and Easton 2009; Hahn 1998). Although there were some constraints on the freedom of speech within the Liberian context, politics, power, and rights were frequent topics of conversation in newspapers, radio shows, and intellectual discussions at tea shops. In addition, the tradition of protest is active in Liberia, where protests by women are credited with accelerating the end of the conflict (Gbowee and Mithers 2011). This legacy differs from traditions in nearby countries: for example, when Liberian refugees in Ghana participated in a protest, Ghanaian authorities arrested protesters who they interpreted as being ungrateful towards a country that had agreed to host them (Binnendijk 2009; Refugee Rights News 2008).

Given the findings of this study, it is critical for those who work to implement education for peace, citizenship, and human rights to understand the civic culture of the country for which they are writing and implementing curriculum. Education for peace and global citizenship continue to be prominent in international policies such as the UN Secretary General's new Global Education First Initiative (Ki-Moon

2012) and teacher education frameworks provided by the United Nations Education Social and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 2010). However, the implementation of these initiatives must be flexible and relevant to local contexts in order to promote increased civic engagement among young people. At the time of this study in Liberia, some peace education initiatives were being jointly developed by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education. The focus of these initiatives was on interpersonal communication and problem-solving. Although this may be valuable, this study suggests that a focus on interpersonal communication may be insufficient for the maintenance of peace. Youth in this context are actively engaged in critiques of political and personal issues, and so peace education initiatives in this context should consider this focus. Different barriers to engagement in varying civic cultures will require adaptations of peace education initiatives.

Conclusion

This study, focusing on a local NGO-sponsored institution, provides an opportunity to understand citizenship education in one African, post-conflict context. Significantly, this study reveals a positive classroom climate in which students make personal connections and question the teacher, a phenomenon undocumented in other studies of post-conflict African schools. This study suggests that the civics classroom in post-conflict Liberia has a rich potential as a site of democratic dialogue (Hess 2009), and that schools in such societies can be places where youth develop problem-solving tools and values that promote human rights and peace, as suggested by scholars and international policy-makers (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; Levine and Bishai 2010; United Nations Children's Fund 2009).

The other main contribution of this study is documentary evidence that students in post-conflict environments are deeply concerned with justice, and want to be able to exercise their own rights. Because post-conflict environments are places where violence and power are entangled, meaningful peace education must provide students with tools to advocate for justice in their society. This can be challenging in an environment marred with corruption, nepotism, and limitations on freedom of speech.

In order to understand the full spectrum of civic education for youth affected by conflict, more wide-scale and longitudinal studies would be necessary. In addition, further studies should include youth voices about the attained curriculum, or what they have actually learned, as well as ways that out-of-school contexts shape student understandings. However, this study reinforces the idea of young people as informed political actors, and challenges studies that suggest that schools in the Liberian context must be a place of marginalization and violence for students.

In conjunction with UNESCO, the Ministry of Education in Liberia published a new manual for citizenship education in 2009 and has begun training teachers as well as students to use the new curriculum. According to one of the authors who works for the Ministry of Education, it is currently only being used in public schools (V. Blama personal communication, June 2, 2010). Researchers may wish to track the impact of this new policy on student conceptions of citizenship in this post-conflict setting, shedding light on ways that new curricula can influence student thinking and set the stage for peace. The collaborative nature of the curriculum produced by an international and national partnership may influence the messages in the curriculum; a hypothesis that warrants further investigation.

This study shares insight into the schooling and citizenship education experience for one group of youth who were displaced during conflict and are part of the reconstruction process, providing a window into a classroom as citizenship education unfolded between a teacher and his students. One of the most striking findings in this study was that for many students, politics mattered in a very real and personal way. Within the classroom, teachers should have pedagogic support to help students to engage with the differences between the implemented curriculum and students' lived experiences, transforming awareness into action. Future work in post-conflict environments should explore the ways that teachers, adults, and organizations engage this awareness inside and outside of schools to promote young people's participation in shaping a positive, peaceful future for themselves and their communities.

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Notes

1. All names used are pseudonyms.
2. The questions in interview 2 are adapted from DeJaeghere (2008).

Notes on contributor

Laura Quaynor is an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of South Carolina Aiken. She received her undergraduate and Master's degrees from the University of Virginia and completed a PhD in Educational Studies at Emory University. Her research interests focus on the ways that schools and teachers prepare students as citizens in the context of disruptive change, with a particular focus on multilingual learners in the United States and students in transitional and post-conflict states. Her work has been published in Education, Citizenship, and Social Justice; The African Symposium; Social Studies and the Young Learner; and the SAGE Encyclopedia of Diversity and Education.

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Appendix 1. Interview Guide

Interview 1

Date: _____ Location: _____ Time:_____

(After two weeks of observations)

Focus concept: *What do Liberian citizens & students need to know in a democratic society*?

Warm up: Thank you for your time talking with me. I'm also so happy to be spending time in your classroom. I wanted to talk to you to learn about what you think students need to learn in order to be prepared for their future as Liberian citizens. I am interested in learning about what Liberian students learn about democracy and citizenship in schools.

What do you think Liberians need to know about democracy and government?
Is knowledge (understanding) or skill (doing and participating) more important for them to learn in the classroom? Why?
What do you think Liberians need to know about their local community or ethnic group?
What do you think Liberians need to know about the rest of the world?
Are these things different now than they were before?
Are any of these things that you think students should learn in your classroom?
How do you teach your students about these things?
If not in your classroom, where do your students learn about their local community? Democracy and government? About the rest of the world?
When you were teaching about _____, you talked about _____. Could you tell me how you chose this example?

Interview 2[2]

Date: _____ Location: _____ Time:_____
(After three weeks of observations)

Focus concept: *Teacher's conceptions of citizenship to local community, Liberia, and the world*

Could you tell me something about your personal life?
Where did you grow up and attend school?
Could you talk about your professional life?
How long have you been a teacher?

Why are you a teacher?

In what type of communities do you tend to be involved in your personal and professional lives?

Do you consider yourself a member of an ethnic group? Of a 'global society'?

Describe for me a few situations or events in which you feel you have acted as a citizen. In these situations, what is it that made you feel like a citizen?

If you were to describe your life as a citizen to someone else, what are the things that you would say?
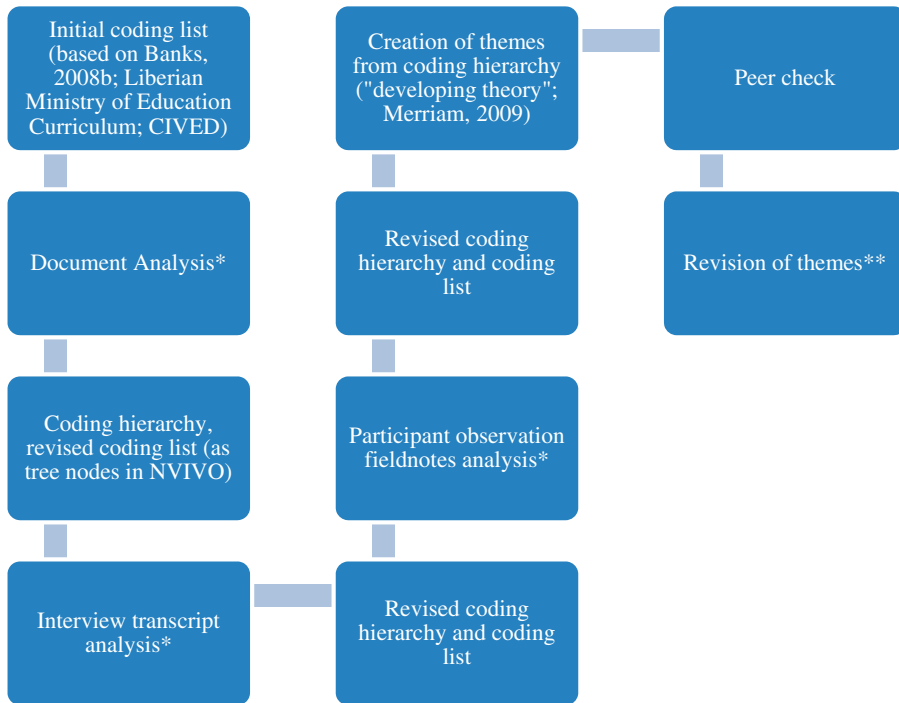
Interview 3

(After four weeks of observations)

Date: _____ Location: _____ Time:_____

Focus: additional clarification

Is there a question that I have not asked about citizenship or democracy that you think is important?

Appendix 2. Data Analysis Process

A * indicates that I had a peer code sections of the documents using the same coding definition sheet.

** indicates that I engaged in memo writing at these steps as I arranged the data into codes, identified the relationship between the codes, and then placed them into reflective themes (Merriam 2009; Miles and Huberman 1994)