

## SOME STRUCTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF EDUCATION

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We who are teachers must surely be aware of the time and space dimensions of our professional activity. Our philosophers may define the values and goals of education in universal terms, such as 'the development of an autonomous and harmonious personality', or in John Dewey's words, 'giving shape to human powers and adapting them to social service'. We recognize, however, that we are training our pupils for a particular kind of life in a particular society, and that we must translate our abstract aims into specific social realities. To be sure, we tend to take the social and political framework within which we operate for granted. Administrators and teachers seldom think it necessary to make explicit the relation between the system of education and the social structure; but that relation does exist in all societies, and is most likely to receive attention in those which undergo a process of radical and rapid change.

The sociological concept of structure is sufficiently amorphous to accommodate a wide variety of meanings, in spite of the apparent precision of the formal definition: the interactions and relations between persons, associations and categories. Sociologists use the concept as an analytical tool to distinguish the sub-systems of a social order, to identify the roles of persons in each sub-system, and to trace the connections between the various parts. Regardless of their individual interests and theoretical differences, sociologists generally agree that their speciality lies in examining every type of social action within its total setting. They insist that no area of human activity is autonomous, that kinship, religion, economics, politics, art, literature and education can be comprehended only by examining the relation of each to all other fields and therefore to the entire structure.

The title of my paper implies the adoption of this approach to the study of education whether in terms of aims, content or methods. I shall concentrate on Africa, because we are teaching in an African country and because we cannot take the social and political framework within which we operate for granted. It is changing; and we are not quite certain about the direction of the change, or the type of education that is best suited to present and future social needs.

To illustrate the uncertainty, I quote from a paper by Augustine Mwingira, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education in Tanzania.<sup>2</sup>

'It should be the purpose of education in any society to transmit from one generation to the next the relevant knowledge, skills and values of that society. Where that society is clearly in need of economic and social development, and has to be prepared to govern itself at local and national level, then the educational planner must need to be something of a sociological philosopher and prophet!.

Education in traditional, pre-colonial Africa did conform to Mr. Mwingira's definition of ideal aims; it did transmit the knowledge, skills and values of the society. That continuity was drastically interrupted, however, by the colonial school system, and has not been restored since the achievement of independence. The specifically African content is relatively insignificant at all levels of instruction in most countries; and the reasons for this are both historical and structural.

The historical determinants were elements of the colonial society. I assume that its character is a matter of common knowledge, and shall refer only to its consequences for education.<sup>3</sup> People can teach only what they know; and the colonial masters, having little knowledge of the African society, taught their pupils to think and act like Europeans. French and Portuguese policies were avowedly assimilationist; the Belgians, believing that they were there to rule indefinitely, concentrated on primary and vocational education; while the British, following their own earlier tradition, left education to the missionaries, who gave it a liberal and religious bias.

Financial stringency and a scarcity of teachers imposed severe restraints. A minute proportion of the population could hope to receive secondary education, and the selection of the favoured few was a major function of the primary schools. The Governor-General of French Equatorial Africa formulated this principle in a circular of May 8, 1925.<sup>4</sup>

Justice and equality would be satisfied, he claimed, by admitting the greatest possible number of children under eleven years to village schools, where they would learn spoken French and the rudiments of arithmetic. The first selection of students would take place at the end of the first year. Most of them would be sent back to their homes; the rest, distinguished by aptitude, zeal, or membership of chiefly families, were to remain for two or three years in the village school, after which the best would be selected for regional schools with the prospect of entering the upper primary school in Brazzaville. The products of the system at different levels would become interpreters, typists, postal clerks, copyists, teachers, minor bookkeepers, work foremen or storekeepers in government service and commerce.

At about the same time an advisory committee was formed in London to advise on education in British tropical Africa.<sup>5</sup> The committee formulated its principles in more philosophical terms than those of the Brazzaville circular

'Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution... It must include the raising up of capable, trustworthy, public-spirited leaders of the people, belonging to their own race. Education thus defined will narrow the hiatus between the educated class and the rest of the community whether chiefs or peasantry'.

French pragmatism, British idealism and Belgian paternalism produced different types of elites or cadres, but with a constant element. Africans were educated for a subordinate role to serve their colonial masters. The roles were functional to the maintenance of a society characterised by a rigid racial dichotomy, a stratification system in which skin-colour was the major determinant of status, and a remarkable concentration of power in the white manority. This statement should be qualified by reference to national and regional variations, such as the difference between Senegal and French Equatorial Africa, or between British West and East or Central Africa. With few exceptions, however, the relations between whites and Africans followed a single pattern. A committee of senior administrators defined it with exceptional frankness in South Africa in 1936.<sup>6</sup> 'The education of White child', they wrote, 'prepares him for life in a dominant society, the education of the Black child for a subordinate society'.

In keeping with the pattern, Africans were educated for minor positions in government and the private sector. The impulse came, in the first instance, from the missionaries, for whom education was subsidiary to their goal of converting people to christianity. Another impulse came from the demand of government, traders, mine owners and missionaries for literate clerks. Vocational training of all kinds took a back seat, more so perhaps in British Central and Southern Africa than elsewhere, because of its expense, the availability of imported white artisans, and the rigidity of industrial colour bars. Those Africans who acquired skills usually learned them on the job, as on the coppermines. The Merle Davis Commission of 1932 reported that:

'A limited number of men are trained at the mines in handicrafts, such as carpentry, iron-work, cement and brickwork, and tin-smithing. Some of this knowledge may be used with advantage on their return home.'

These trades are of more definite value where the worker seeks employment in a European settlement. However, a real dilemma for a majority of the men is how to use what they have learned on the copper belt in their tribal surroundings.' 7

The content of the education provided was predominantly literary and also closely related to the curriculum, syllabus and examination standards of schools in the imperial state. Africans were trained for white-collar jobs. These were most readily available, carried the highest prestige in the occupational spectrum open to Africans, and were the best paid. The values taught were those of the English or French middle-class; and they left a deep impression on the educated African who had no choice but to accept them if he wished to reap the material and social rewards of his labours. The reasons for his preference need to be emphasised, in view of the reproaches often levelled against him as in the following passage, written in about 1960:

'Education is seen as the open sesame to European power and prestige. A diploma is revered and often has a significance far beyond academic achievement. Many Africans who have reached a certain stage of education have a positive aversion to physical labour. For example, the luxurious, multi-racial Ridgeway Hotel in Lusaka wanted to train a cadre of African hoteliers. They hired students from Munalii secondary school and started them from the bottom up. But not many Africans with secondary schooling were interested in training that included manual labour, and the scheme has been abandoned. Similarly, the copper mines have difficulty<sup>in</sup> finding educated Africans for responsible, well-paid positions, if the job involved dirtying one's hands. As a result, many Standard 6 graduates continue to seek work as white-collar clerks, often with little success'.

We need to know more about the circumstances to interpret the incidents and trends here specified with a reasonable amount of insight. Did Africans object to all forms of manual work, or only to menial labour under white supervision? What careers were open to the Munalii students in the hotel? Could they rise higher than a waiter or bar attendant? What kind of 'dirty' work was available to educated Africans on the mines? Since the white unions successfully resisted attempts to train or employ Africans in supervisory or technical positions other than as 'boss boy', they could hardly have moved far up the occupational ladder.

The motives may be obscure, but the preference shown for white-collar employment undoubtedly existed, as it probably did among grammar school boys in England. If L.J. Lewis is correct, the traditional aims of British university education 'are essentially the preservation, advancement and propagation of learning'. It is not surprising that Africans who were educated according to British academic traditions should have absorbed these values and the associated attitudes to work and life. For, in spite of the principles laid down by the Advisory Committee on Education in British Tropical Africa in 1925, little had been done to adapt education to the special needs and conditions of the African population.

Changes in the educational system between the end of the second world war and the advent of independence were quantitative rather than qualitative. School enrolment in most countries expanded by over 100% between 1946 and 1956. The leaders of national movements agitated for the increase; it was considered desirable by colonial governments for political reasons, the most important being the notion that a mass electorate should be educated; and it seemed a necessary adjunct to schemes on foot for the development of foodstuffs and raw materials urgently required by the metropolitan powers.

The foundations of primary education had been laid in the previous quarter of a century; and it was this sector that expanded most. The position in Zambia, or Northern Rhodesia as it then was, can be gauged from the Colonial Office Report of 1958:

'It is the government's long-term policy to provide a full primary course of eight years for all children and it is estimated that already about 90 per cent of the lower primary age group (8 to 11 years of age) in the rural areas are at school. In the towns, however, the figure for children of this age group is less than 50 per cent. After the age of 11 or 12, only 50 per cent of the children are able to carry on with the upper primary course. Until more money becomes available with the building of schools and more teachers with secondary education qualifications can be trained, no rapid progress can be expected and the practical prospects of providing full primary education for all children therefore remains fairly remote'.

Munali was the only secondary school in 1958 with a complete matriculation course reaching the senior Cambridge certificate level. The Copperbelt, whose African population was estimated at 700,000 in that year, had no secondary school for Africans, and only about twenty children from the region could be absorbed into secondary schools elsewhere. Such schools did not exist for girls, but three were enrolled in the sixth form at Goromonzi in Southern Rhodesia in 1958. The estimated school age population was 444,000, of whom 243,900 were enrolled in primary schools, 1,890 in secondary, and 1,840 in technical and vocational schools. To raise the secondary school enrolment to 10 per cent of the primary school enrolment, places would have had to be found for an additional 22,500 pupils.

I do not propose to plot the progress made since independence, or to examine the difficulties encountered, but shall draw on Unesco sources to indicate the overall position in countries south of the Sahara exclusive of those under white minority rule. A conference of African ministers of education, meeting in Addis Ababa in 1961, set targets for a short-term plan covering the period 1960-65. <sup>10</sup> Some of the relevant figures are as follows:

	Primary %	Secondary %	Higher %
Proportion of enrolment to relevant age group for the base year 1960-61	36	3	0.2
Target figures set for 1965-66	47	6	0.4
Actual figures 1965-66	44	5	0.5

The conference aimed at a target of secondary enrolment rising from 5.7% of primary enrolment in 1960-61 to 10.4% by 1965-66; and at a shift in secondary education from general to vocational, technical and teacher training enrolment. The actual distribution of secondary enrolment in 1965-66 fell short of the targets:

	General %	Vocational and Technical %	Teacher Training %
Secondary enrolment, 1960-61	79	9	12
Target figures for 1965-66	76	12	12
Actual distribution in 1965-66	83	8	9

The colonial mould had not been broken. The bias towards a general type of education has been strengthened to the disadvantage of vocation education and teacher training. Another characteristic, which is not reflected in the statistics, is the persistence of pre-independence curricula. English or French remains the medium of instruction in all but a few territories.

Most secondary schools in former British colonies have continued to follow the English grammar school curriculum. Decolonisation has certainly not been achieved in this vitally important and strategic area of national development. Rather than give my own interpretation of the consequences, I shall call on the testimony of Augustine Mwingira, who feels strongly that the school system of the colonial period tended to estrange the educated African from his people, generated ambitions for worldly goods which could not be satisfied in a rural society, and introduced class divisions where none had existed. He writes:

'We inherited a system of African boarding secondary schools, run along the lines of an English public school. In their extreme form, they were cases of comfortable living and intellectual arrogance set in a desert of struggling humanity. For the seven years of their attendance - or even longer - the intellectual and physiological cream of our youth usually contributed nothing to their material existence, either at school or at home. On leaving school, they were moving into jobs vacated by expatriates, based upon the planned obsolescence of consumer durables and "keeping up with the Joneses". Clearly, though a highly industrial technological society can sustain these values for certain classes of its structured society, a rural agrarian society could afford such expectations even for a very small elite only at the expense of the rest of the society'. 11

The description may be accurate, but it is certainly not complete. It omits the political results of the system. Men who were educated for junior posts in the administration inevitably became aware of their inferior position in the colonial society and resentful of alien rule. Eventual self-government was a declared aim of British colonial policy; whereas the French aspired to create an African elite in their own image; yet both planted the seeds of a national consciousness and a movement for independence.

Apart from Congo Kinshasha, power was transferred by agreement and in stages throughout Sub-Saharan Africa north of the Zambesi. It was an evolutionary process which left the structure of society unchanged. The nationalists who headed the newly independent states rejected alien rule, but not the political, economic and religious institutions inherited from the rulers. In spite of its many defects, the colonial educational systems had succeeded, perhaps beyond expectations, in training a corps of leaders capable of taking over the government and administering it in the spirit and according to the rules of the metropolitan bourgeois societies.

The continuity is remarkable and probably the most significant feature of African states. It should not be thought as inevitable or permanent. Toure of Guinea, Nkrumah of Ghana and Nyerere of Tanzania have demonstrated that the leaders can conceive of a restructured society adapted to African needs and cultural backgrounds. Even in these countries, however, and more so elsewhere, the imprints of the colonial past remain. They are more deeply embedded in the educational system than in any other area of social activity.

One of the reasons for this persistence of pre-independence standards and values is the time factor. Considering that twelve years of formal education are needed to produce a secondary school graduate, we can assume that our teachers, secondary school pupils and university students received all or most of their schooling before 1964, and to that extent were trained in the earlier tradition. Their goals have been set by that tradition which, as I have noted, emphasised the social importance and material rewards of white-collar employment. Events since independence have strengthened this preference.

The new governments gave priority, I think rightly so, to the Africanization of the public services in both senior and junior grades. There was great urgency in the matter, and simply no time to reshape the administration or the training of administrators. Schools and universities were harnessed to the purpose of preparing men to take over from the expatriate civil servants, to sit in their offices, live in their houses, and maintain their standards and procedures. Given these conditions, our teachers could hardly do otherwise than teach in the old, familiar ways.

The opening of new occupational vistas and centres of power had a feedback effect on teachers and therefore on pupils which has been described by J.M. Mwanakatwe, a leading educationalist and former minister of education. <sup>12</sup>

'Since independence, there has been a gradual but conspicuous erosion of the teachers' status as more Zambians reach the upper rungs of the civil service. While in pre-independence days the African teacher, more especially the African headmaster, held an enviable position of leadership and influence, today it is the senior administrative officer who commands authority and respect as the true successor of the former colonial administrator, at least in the eyes of the simple unsophisticated citizens in both rural and urban areas. It is therefore not a surprise that many young men and women who reach an appreciably high level of education are no longer attracted to the teaching profession. In the years ahead, the teaching profession must be prepared to encounter severe competition for recruits from the more colourful but perhaps less important in the context of Zambia's real needs, professions such as law, journalism and administration'.

Similar responses to the challenge of new opportunities are widely reported in Africa. The obvious answer is to attract people to the teaching profession by raising its status, particularly by improving qualifications, for which time is needed, and by improving salaries, for which money is needed. Both time and money are in short supply. Unesco data shows that educational expenditure in Sub-Saharan Africa increased by 16 % between 1960 and 1965, that the major reason for the increase has been a rise in teachers' pay, and that the rise in real incomes has been from 4 to 8 %, which is much greater than the growth in per capita incomes or in family incomes. Unfortunately, the larger the proportion of the educational budget that goes into teachers' salaries the smaller is the amount available for increasing the size of the school population. The budget itself could be increased, but not indefinitely, as the following extract from an I.L.O. publication shows:

'It is generally considered in Africa that the maximum that can be devoted to education without seriously endangering other vital functions of the State is 25 per cent. of the national budget. Some African countries have already reached or exceeded this maximum, though the investment has benefited only a relatively small proportion of the population of school age. An extreme case is that of Upper Volta, which devotes 25 per cent. of its budget to education and training but reaches only 9 per cent. of the population of school age'. <sup>13</sup>

Unesco's figures probably overstate the benefits to African teachers of the increase in salary scales.

Much of that increase is taken up by the salaries paid to secondary school teachers recruited from overseas, and who in 1965 formed 51 % of the staff of such schools in African states south of the Sahara. Because of this high proportion, both salaries and teaching standards of the secondary schools are closely related to those of more developed and wealthier countries in Europe, Asia or America. It is convenient at this point to take a closer look at the impact that the expatriate teachers make on the educational system.

They cannot be dispensed with at the present stage; and therefore they make an invaluable contribution. It is politically expedient to employ educated Africans in the public services, where power lies, or in the business world, which controls the economy. Teachers do not decide policy; they execute the decisions made by politicians and administrators. All this serves to explain why expatriate teachers are preferred to expatriate civil servants, and why the Africanisation of government service and private enterprise takes precedence over the Africanisation of the teaching profession! There are other, equally convincing reasons; yet, when these have been stated, the startling fact remains that a strategic area of development is being steadily infiltrated by outsiders who, however dedicated to their calling, are alien to the society in which they function and generally unfamiliar with its culture, language, and aspirations. Yet, is it not a commonplace of our philosophy that education should be an integral part of the national culture and portray its values and goals.

I may be pardoned for introducing a personal note from a controversial social matrix. I attended a small country school in a predominantly Afrikaans community, and studied at one of the big Afrikaans universities in South Africa. There I learned to recognise the great integrative power of a vigorous nationalism which has been generated by the conditions of alien rule. No person with a knowledge of South Africa can doubt that the breeding ground and mainsprings of Afrikaans nationalism have been the party, the church, the school and university; and that a major reason for its ascendancy is the impact of teachers who inspired generations of school children with an ardent devotion to their language, tradition, culture and people. It is a brand of nationalism that I deplore, but any personal evaluation is irrelevant to an acknowledgement of its cohesive qualities and driving force. If African nationalisms have not yet reached the same high level of endeavour, a major retarding factor has been the persistence of foreign ideologies in the educational system through the instrumentality of expatriate teachers.

This is not a matter for praise or blame. The expatriate is a product of his cultural environment. He absorbed it as naturally as he learnt his native language. To be true to himself, he must impart his cultural values. Any superficial attempt to acquire the African's way of looking at things or to express himself in the African idiom would be ineffective and depreciate his value as an educator. He cannot hope to do the job that the African teacher must and will accomplish in time to come. As of now, however, the expatriate is a potent force for alienating the African student from his cultural heritage.

The university, like the secondary school, is a medium for the transmission of Western values, which are those of class society. To quote Thomas Hodgkin:

'The expatriate academics who came out as founding fathers, and played a major part in shaping the new institutions, represented in the main the more conformist aspects of Western University life. Indeed, they were partly selected for this reason'.<sup>14</sup>

We witness the consequences of such conservatism at our own university, in the resistance to a course on African Studies, the absence of a course on African languages, and the absence of a course on African customary law - three important fields for a policy of orienting students to their culture and the problems associated with its development. We are training men and women who will move into the top status groups in the Zambian society, and the status for which we train them is that of an assimilated European. For our university, like the universities of other African states, whether they belong to the English or the French tradition, is, in the words of an American observer, 'frankly assimilationist with language, institutional forms, curricular content, and academic standards adopted from or closely modelled after those of the Metropole'.<sup>15</sup>

Professor Smith continues:

'Both the classical European model and its African version were geared to produce scholars and gentlemen - members of an elite held together by shared familiarity with a classical cultural tradition, one that in the African case might still be only superficially grafted on a radically alien background'.

This will suit a society that is committed to a policy of retaining the elitist orientation of the present system of schooling and social class structure, the foundations of which were laid in the colonial era. If, therefore, the policy-makers wish to perpetuate and strengthen the existing class distinctions, they will allow the inequalities in the selection of pupils for secondary and higher education to continue, and provide the privileged few with an education in which stress is laid on individual achievement and personal gain. Such an approach has been urged in the interests of efficiency and economic growth. 'In this sense', writes Philip Foster, 'differentiation is an inevitable consequence of development; growing inequality is the price that must be paid for economic advance'.

Socialists, communists and many African leaders reject this conclusion. They deny that economic progress is possible only in a class society or, conversely, that an egalitarian society is necessarily stagnant. This is not the place for a debate on the respective merits of capitalism and communism, but it would be misleading to ignore the economic achievements of communist societies which have adopted egalitarian ideals. As to the African experience, we could hardly do better than to listen to Julius Nyerere. He argues, I think convincingly, that 'Only when we are clear about the kind of society we are trying to build



can we design our educational service to serve our goals'. The goals of Tanzanians, he explains, are related to the achievement of equality in all spheres. "We are, in other words, committed to a socialist future in which the people will themselves determine the policies pursued by a Government which is responsible to them'. Tanzanians, he claims, are moving towards the goal of rural development through self-reliance and cooperation.

'This is what our educational system has to encourage. It has to foster the social goals of living together, and working together, for the common good. It has to prepare our young people to play a dynamic and constructive part in the development of a society in which all members share fairly in the good or bad fortune of the group, and in which progress is measured in terms of human well-being, not prestige buildings, cars, or other such things, whether privately or publicly owned. Our education must therefore inculcate a sense of commitment to the total community, and help the pupils to accept the values appropriate to our kind of future, not those appropriate to our colonial past."

The obstacles to the achievement of these goals are immense, as they must be to any great enterprise. The first step towards a solution, however, is the definition of the problem. That, I suggest, is what Nyerere has done. His policy of rural self-reliance is designed to maintain continuity with the traditional past, the kind of society that existed before colonialism; while at the same time it proposes ways, and means of reshaping that society to satisfy the needs and aspirations of the great majority of Africans in the modern world. His essential aim is to modernize the African personality. Can we think of a better guideline for our teachers, schools and universities ?

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