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Conceptualizing Human Development and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa at the Interface of Indigenous and Exogenous Influences

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Sub-Saharan Africa is immense, not only in terms of its size, but more so with respect to the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity that characterize the over 500 million inhabitants of its numerous countries. As Olaniyan (1982, p. 1) observed, "With almost a thousand separate language groups, a variety of climatic regions and greatly different levels of social and economic development... Africa is a continent of bewildering diversity and extraordinary dynamism." This dynamism perhaps reflects the youthfulness of the continent's population. Over 60 per cent of Africa's population comprise children and youth, and in many countries, females outnumber the other demographic cohorts. Age structure determines national needs, particularly access to wholesome education, and patterns of public and personal expenditure. As elsewhere in the world, though much more so for sub-Saharan Africa, the continent's future hope lies in its youth, especially the girl child, who, compared to the boy child, has limited opportunities but performs the bulk of family subsistence work. Today's children are the bridges to the future, a point that calls for critical examination of Africa's apparent difficulty or faltering efforts at providing a headstart for proper development and utilizing the

potential of its youth fully as a productive resource for personal progress and national development. In order to view this problem in context, it is instructive to first understand how Africa fares in societal development and other indicators of quality of life.

Vital statistics and development indicators overwhelmingly point to the failure of educational and development efforts in sub-Saharan Africa. The failure is partly attributed to educational curricula that are externally rather than locally-oriented. For example, Africa inherited systems of education and development planning from colonial Europe, but they have neither genuinely incorporated African views on personhood and child rearing nor addressed indigenous African social thought and modes of constructing knowledge.

African cultural communities have a rich heritage of education and, like all cultures, seek to pass on what they know and have learned to the next generation. This ensures not only their inclusive fitness, but their cultural continuity as well. However, the history of education as it is now conceived and taught, focuses almost exclusively on the ways in which Western educational traditions emerged, evolved and became consolidated, to the unfortunate neglect of non-Western educational heritages. In this way educational curricula and development programmes fail because they largely ignore or undermine African patterns of child development, economic life, and participatory education (Nsamenang, 1992).

This paper aims to draw attention to some theoretical and practical issues that pertain to conceptualizing human development and education in sub-Saharan Africa at the interface of competing indigenous and imported psychologies. It is framed by the fact that contemporary Africa has a hybrid cultural character that is the product of local and alien mentalities and lifestyles living together in the same communities and individuals. The cultural braid this duality engenders is, theoretically speaking, a more complex lived reality than has hitherto been articulated (Nsamenang, 2001). This paper begins with an explication of an indigenous African worldview and conceptions of human development and education. It proceeds to examine the relationship between human development and education and ends with a discussion of the implications of an Afrocentric perspective for human development research in the context of school education and the issues emerging therefrom.

Indigenous African Views on Personhood and Human Development

Keller and Greenfield (2000) submitted that the human disposition to benefit from experience is based on evolved, maturational capacities for the co-construction of language, tools, social interaction, etc. Indeed, between a universal humanity and specific individuality lies the large cultural zone in every human being created by a particular culture (Maquet, 1972) that inspires a specific view of life and the world. A set of ecological and demographic realities, cultural traditions, and existential imperatives marks out an indigenous African worldview. In fact, LeVine and colleagues (LeVine, Dixon, LeVine, & Richman, 1994) asserted that sub-Saharan Africa includes meaningfully different human populations and interactional networks within which specific patterns of mating and other communicative processes tend to be concentrated. For instance, sub-Saharan Africans share a "natural" ecology, symbol systems for encoding that ecology, and such social institutions as marriage and family and cultural rule systems for adapting to them. This presupposes the existence of peculiarly African ideas, practices, and issues that in the opinion of Serpell (1992) stand in sharp contrast to the group of cultures loosely known as Western. African views of the world and the human person, for example, ordain a developmental path that differs from those that inform contemporary developmental psychology and the processes of education (Serpell, 1993; 1994).

African Worldview and Conception of Personhood

Every cultural community has a worldview that includes an image of the human being and his or her ontogenesis. A worldview is a shared frame of reference or psychosocial outlook by which members of a particular culture perceive or make sense of the universe and the place of the human being in it (Nsamenang, 1992). It implicates the social representations with which a given culture makes sense of human existence. Social representations shape social interactions and impose an imperative obligation on

members to adopt a culturally appropriate gender identity and pattern of social thought. It inspires a specific image of the human being and the life course. Essentially, a worldview conceives of the child as a cultural agent to which the future hopes of society and survival of its culture is entrusted (Reagan, 1996). Bruner (1996) used notions of folk psychology and folk pedagogy to drive home the point that each society develops ethnotheories about why people behave the way they do and how children grow up and become adults. Indeed, throughout human history, people have socialized and educated their offspring to maturity and responsibility.

A worldview is psychologically salient because its central concern is the fate of the individual. But African notions of individuality and autonomy are basically relational and interdependent rather than individualistic and self-contained. In this sense, a frame of reference that focuses on the individual does not come to the African easily, because the individual gains significance from and through his relatedness with others (Ellis, 1978). Thus, like the Japanese (Lebra, 1976), Africans are most fully human in the context of others, hence the developmental value of the environing community. The community of other humans is so essential that African social thought prescribes rites of social incorporation at various ontogenetic points of life like birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

An African metaphor that addresses a gradual ontogenetic progress to maturity, relatedness, and competence is *seed*. The seed is typically nursed into maturity and responsibility in a sociological field in which roles are shared among the young and the old (Nsamenang, in press). The West African conception of person centres on the image of the "unfinished child" (D'Alessio, 1990). Thus, the African worldview visualizes the infant in terms of its "becoming" (Erny, 1968) more and more humane through enculturation, socialization, and education. Becoming fully a human person is thus a matter of incremental maturation throughout ontogeny (Nsamenang, 2000b). The African concept of being is dynamic and rooted in the belief that personhood is attained not only as one grows old, but also in direct proportion to the enactment of one's status roles and social insertion in the community (Nsamenang, 1992). The structure of the self that emerges from the African social ontogenesis is reflected in Mead's (1934/1972)

submission that "The self has a character which is different from the physiological organism. The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there at birth but arises in the process of social experience and activity" (p. 154). In their assent to adult maturity and responsibility, children construct and modify their social identities through successive interpersonal encounters and autobiographical experiences that make up their ontogenetic history. For example, adolescents are obliged to construct a gender and ethnic identity consistent with the cultural scripts and gender demands of their worldviews. Within this worldview, socialization and education are organized to gradually integrate children from an early age into responsible roles through guided participation in valued cultural and economic activities at different stages of life. It is modulated to mesh with children's emerging abilities. The desired end state is not cognitive competence, per se, but responsible social development or cognition in service of social ends.

Applied to the African context, the concept of social ontogeny draws on African life journeys (Serpell, 1993) to posit three phases of the human life cycle: spiritual selfhood, social selfhood, and ancestral selfhood (Nsamenang, 1992). The experiential or social selfhood begins at birth (or more accurately from the ritual naming of the child) and extends to death. West Africans regard the human neonate as a framework that shelters a spiritual selfhood on to which a social selfhood begins ontogenetic development on the conferment of a name. Children are not thought to belong to this world until they have been incorporated into the community of the living through naming. Ancestral selfhood follows biological death and extends to the ritual initiation of the ancestral spirit into the spiritual realm. Spiritual selfhood begins from the ritual incorporation of the ancestral spirit into the world of spirits and ends with birth (through reincarnation), or more accurately with the naming ritual. Although this viewpoint extends the human life course to an afterlife, developmental psychology has so far concentrated on the experiential self. Social selfhood is divided into seven stages: the newborn, social priming, social apprenticing, social entrée, social interment, adulthood, and old age (Nsamenang, 1992). Each of these stages is characterized by a distinct developmental task that derives from important transitions

between patterns of social participation that define the culture's perceptions of the family, children and their welfare.

An Afrocentric perspective on human development may begin to inform the field of how current theorizing and assumptions ignore or undermine alternative developmental pathways. Thus, a training programme or research agenda based on alternative viewpoints will introduce important inputs against which to gauge the extent to which some normative elements of human development constructed within Euro-American worldviews, for instance, may be inappropriate for Africans and the global nature of human development (Nsamenang, in press). A modest contribution in this direction is perhaps my (Nsamenang, 1992) characterization of African social ontogeny as a cumulative process of social integration into the family and community that Serpell (1994) claimed differs in theoretical focus from the more individualistic perspectives on ontogenesis that dominate Western paradigms.

Students and scholars will gain from this perspective because an Afrocentric view on human development is ordained by a worldview that differs from that of Europe and its diaspora on which contemporary developmental psychology has evolved. Thus, an African view of human ontogenesis can enrich the discipline, informing it about some of what are, or are not, universal aspects of the human life path (Nsamenang, 1999). More specifically, it invites Euro-American social scientists and Western trained social scientists of all nations to critically question their motives for neglecting sub-Saharan African or similar views on human development (Holdstock, 2000).

How Culture Influences Human Development

Although the need to integrate biology into the social sciences seems obvious, it has not received the attention it deserves. However, the pitting of biology against culture is gradually leading to the recognition that social ontogeny interfaces human biology and culture (Keller, 2000). For example, the human capacity to be educated, or more accurately, to acquire culture, is provided by biological heritage or genetic endowment. The human being as a

biological organism fuses with the developmental context as an ecosystem and culture because what matures in human organisms are the abilities to learn various elements of culture (Keller & Greenfield, 2000). The interface is the *zone of developmental change* requiring exploration (Nsamenang, 2000a). A developmental approach to social ontogeny provides the framework within which to explore the interplay of biological and cultural influences as different developmental tasks (Keller & Greenfield, 2000). To understand the ontogeny of human culture calls for a consideration of both universal processes of human development and the specificity of cultural differentiation during ontogeny. In order to accurately capture this interplay, it seems advisable to critically review the distinction between expected and actual life experiences (Greenough, Black, & Wallace, 1987/1993). The plausibility of this advice derives from the fact that, so far, the primary focus of developmental research has been more on conceptualized attributes rather than on lived experiences that social ontogeny inspires.

The foregoing discussion cautions us against the thinking that because a behavioural phenomenon has a biological foundation, it is immune to cultural or environmental influences. The interaction between symbolic culture and biology is a key determinant of the development of behaviour, emotion, and mentality that equally deserves attention. This calls for the focus of research on cultural learning, as characterized by the processes, outcomes, and biological foundations that make possible language, tools, thought, and patterns of social thought and interaction.

Approaches to incorporating culture into developmental research should be grounded on the realization that, although the developmental impact of culture is at the individual level, it has generally been operationalized as a macro level construct. It is obvious that every human mind develops in a cultural context. The mind grows by assimilating the culture and adapting to it; the mind weaves a new culture around and inside it (Azuma, 2000). This "personal culture" is fed back to the wider culture (Kitayama, 1997). We should further note that all human beings operate in their worlds as individual agents of culture, bringing their implicit, underlying psychological culture to every context, situation, and interaction (Matsumoto, 1996). For example, children carry their

culture to school, whereas parents take theirs to work and to all social encounters. Since culture fulfils a fundamental role, it is a basic part of every human being. As it plays a key role in shaping our sense of self and identity, it has a pervasive influence on all our behaviours across all contexts (Matsumoto, 1996). The processes of cultural learning both depend on and affect human development (Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993).

Culture influences human development by not only ensuring the physical survival of children (LeVine, 1974), but also by ensuring that children acquire the survival skills and strategies of their group or people (Ogbu, 1988). Culture equally influences development by ensuring that children acquire appropriate cognitive, communicative, motivational, and social–emotional or affective and spiritual attributes, as well as practical skills that will make them competent adults who will contribute to their own survival and progress and that of their people and society. Finally, culture influences development by providing the formulas by which competencies are transmitted and acquired by children. These are the processes of cultural learning, and these vary over both ontogenetic time (different points in the life cycle) and cultural domains (such as cognition, affect, and social responsibility).

Therefore, human development is a cultural process, albeit a dynamic one. In every society children learn a cultural, not a universal, curriculum. They are obliged to adapt to the accumulated cultural heritage of their people or adjust to that of the dominant culture, but often they adapt selectively to both. Cultural learning usually takes place, not in a homogenous society, but in a culturally diverse one, where competing sets of norms and values interplay. The vast majority of human beings acquire culture in multicultural contexts, hence the need to understand how multiculturalism shapes psychological development. According to Azuma (2000), every known culture is hybrid; any mind develops through interacting with a multiplicity of cultures. The mentality of the contemporary Africans, for instance, is shaped by the interplay of indigenous and alien cultural forces and images of personhood that coexist in what Mazrui (1986) termed a triple heritage. This triple inheritance pertains to the extent to which imported Eastern and Western images and conceptions of childhood and child life now coexist, collide and have transformed or stagnated indigenous

African views on children and their development. Although the word indigenous connotes circumscribed, fixed and being solid and stable, in reality, any culture involves some fluidity (Azuma, 2000). Thus, even in traditional Africa, cultural as well as developmental norms are not static; they are socially contested and rapidly changing in response to contact with other cultures, ecological shifts, and existential dynamics. This creates a dialectical process that implicates cross-cultural value conflict. An innovative cross-cultural research programme may focus on the psychological effects of value conflict on the development of school children in the hybrid societies of Africa and their implications for curricular reforms and development assistance.

Search for Relevant Educational Curricula for Sub-Saharan Africa

Most books and study programmes that deal with the history and philosophy of education and human development include few, if any, references to indigenous educational ideas and practices in Africa. Although there have recently been calls for the consideration of African perspectives (Holdstock, 2000), most such efforts, whenever they have been attempted, have often entailed little more than the addition of vignettes or footnotes pointing to African contributions to Western databases. In fact, whenever Western scholars elect to listen, say, to African social thought, the tendency has been to decide *a priori* what they wanted to hear or see and how it should be said or seen (Tangwa, 1996). Even African scholars are constrained by Eurocentric rules of the game to address the international audience, that is, North Americans and Western Europeans, rather than speak to their own people in their own terms (Nsamenang, 1999).

In this section, we first present some salient features of African educational traditions. Then, we proceed to examine the current state of formal education or schooling in Africa in juxtaposition to indigenous African educational thought and practice. In the process, we explore some of the key reasons for the failure of education to satisfy sub-Saharan Africa.

INDIGENOUS AFRICAN EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE

Education, as deliberate teaching or training of the young, is a specific form of enculturation and socialization, widely referred to as schooling (Nsamenang, in press). Tomasello, Kruger, and Ratner (1993) characterized it as instructed learning. Others have referred to it variously as school learning, formal, formalized or institutional education, usually in contrast to participatory or societal learning, home training and nonformalized or nonformal education. It is important to note, however, that teaching and learning are not the monopoly of schools; they occur in and out of school (Desforges, 1995). In some cultures, children's learning is organized primarily through didactic instruction and extensive cognitive stimulation in institutions. In African family traditions, children are guided and encouraged, with little or no instruction, to observe and participate in the ongoing cultural and economic life of the family and community.

The aim of indigenous African education is to socialize responsible participation in acceptable and valued social and economic activities—a highly cherished moral quality that is relatively ignored in the curricula of most schools in Africa (Serpell, 1993). Most productive and moral lessons imparted to children are tacitly woven into the texture of daily life activities. Through them, children are apprenticed not only to imbibe useful economic skills but also to acquire prosocial attitudes and values of generosity, sharing, and caring. For example, children perform chores and take care of younger siblings to reflect the principle of sharing family responsibility (Serpell, 1992) and the priming process of learning the caretaker role from an early age (Nsamenang, 1992). Unfortunately, school curricula in Africa continue to ignore these forms of responsibility training and cognitive functioning.

The role of parents and other mentors in this type of education is (Nsamenang, in press):

1. To guide children to accept and understand the appropriate adult identity and models toward which they are being prepared.
2. To communicate standards of valued behaviour and virtue.
3. To prime and ensure their acquisition.

The input of the peer group at all ages is significant because from toddlerhood, children spend more time and interact more within the peer culture than in adult–child dyads (Jahoda, 1982). For example, when children play, share, challenge one another, and engage in and resolve conflicts within the free spirit of the peer culture or interact with significant others, the social identities asserted therein and the values deployed evoke social representations and locate children and their interlocutors as important social partners.

Whereas international advocacy tends to condemn the participatory role of the African child as exploitative child labour, it is important to realize that in the subsistence economies of Africa, such "labour" is legitimately interpreted as "an indigenous educational strategy that keeps children in contact with existential realities and the activities of daily life" (Nsamenang, 1992). By deriving its contents from the local environment, being integrated with productive work, and by addressing the needs of society, traditional education appears more salient than schooling (Segall, Dasen, Berry, & Poortinga, 1999), at least in the context of sub-Saharan Africa. Incidentally, it is schooling that separates and distances children from these activities. This shortcoming of the school in Africa is reflected in Bruner's (1996) cogent remark that "schooling may even be at odds with a culture's other ways of inducting the young into the requirements of communal living" (p. ix).

DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE IN EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

As soon as schooling was introduced in Africa, it began to spiral out of control, as schools began to churn out unemployed youth who could read and write, but could not interpret, construct, or use knowledge from their own environments (Hoppers, 1981). This state of affairs was perhaps due to the fact that Western-type of education was introduced in Africa as a "modernization" tool to assist Africa to catch up with "progress" and civilization. Education was not designed to help Africans understand themselves and their world. The imported systems of education did not

incorporate African cultural and economic realities, social thought, and modes of constructing knowledge, among other exclusions.

Thus, while most African families continue to rely on indigenous forms of participatory learning, African countries have put in place imported education systems in which children receive didactic instruction from adults outside the context of skilled activity. The imported systems only intermittently and uncommittedly attempt to gain from the social intelligence and responsibility training inherent in African educational traditions. Thus, the education so far imparted by schools in sub-Saharan Africa has somehow been inadequate as schooling denies African children the constructs that form the building blocks of their daily life and identity. That is, the education of African children has failed to connect appropriately with their everyday cognition and life journeys (Serpell, 1993).

Instead, the school led to the impression that African culture is an obstacle to development and modernity (Serpell, 1993) and that African homes are culturally deficient dungeons to escape. Consequently, the role of the school has been to help Africans overcome their backwardness. This explains why deficit models have been applied in Africa. Such models continue to be applied, failing to acknowledge that the education imparted so far has been of limited value and little relevance to Africans. Our estimation is that the present systems of schooling instead help to alienate and decontextualize their African learners because they fail to mesh with local realities. They have, for instance, taken education away from parents, thereby reducing parent–child relations and separating them from the daily activities of personal and family life. Thus, the massive and expensive expansion of inherited colonial systems of education is not entirely suitable for contemporary African realities and needs (Basu, 1987).

The Current State of the Field

The evolution of schooling shows some disparities such as differences in enrolment, literacy rates, and the gendered profile of literacy. In Cameroon (Republic of Cameroon, 1993), for instance, 44.9 per cent boys as compared to 37.3 per cent girls received primary education and 14.6 per cent boys as against

8.9 per cent girls were enrolled in secondary education. The general pattern is similar for sub-Saharan Africa. Although educational opportunities for girls have shown signs of improvement, Africa still has the lowest female literacy rate in the world. In 1993, 26 million African girls were out of school, most of them in rural areas. This figure was estimated to rise to 36 million by the year 2000 (The Ouagadougou Declaration, 1993). This disparity may be due to the fact that the girl child carries the double burden of household chores and childcare.

Some Liberian adolescents perceived the school as a "golden key of our New World" (Fricke, 1979). The view of the school as a source of enlightenment and expansion of horizons carries the potential to transcend the shortcomings of the forms in which schooling is packaged (Serpell, 1996). This positivist outlook should be viewed vis-à-vis Freitag's (1996) caution that the school is neither a panacea for all societal ills nor an all-powerful poison that destroys society. Although schooling is fundamentally about individual experience (Serpell, 1993), the intellectual empowerment the school confers instead serves to alienate its African converts to their traditions and stark realities. The cognitive systems and lifestyles the school inspires have not really suited the requirements of Africa's agrarian economies.

Not only does schooling distance children from parents, thereby increasing peer influence and the generation gap, but it also limits children's availability and contribution to the family economy. Faced with the conflict of interests between family subsistence and the demands of school (Serpell, 1993), some parents allow their children to continue in school but use their services intermittently for economic activities, while others withdraw them and involve them in economic activities. In urban areas in Africa, teenage school children are active in the street economy, as a full-time or part-time after school activity that may fetch the only income for the family (Bekombo, 1981). Other factors that stifle educational progress include modern information and communication technologies that are conspicuous by their non-existence: The diploma syndrome and rote learning dominate the pedagogical system. There are innumerable unemployed school leavers and graduates whose education is unsuited to the needs of Africa's largely agrarian job market. For example, school curricula have little or no relationship with the life of Africans and the environment they

are familiar with. These are only some of the factors that make school dismal and evoke limited flickers of interest in learners. This precipitates a high rate of school dropout. These constraints compromise the potential contribution of the school in sub-Saharan Africa.

The disjunction between school and daily life is a cause for concern for African nations—whether their youths are acquiring the skills and responsible values to catch up with the technological developments of the twenty-first century and satisfy the demands of an acceptable human growth index. The core issue is how to design and implement relevant educational curricula; how to use youth, school leavers and graduates as a potential resource rather than as problematic cohorts. Whereas indigenous African educational traditions endeavour to connect children to their local contexts and daily life activities, the school tends to isolate and distance them.

The crucial value of the school is not being disputed or questioned here. However, efforts to evolve relevant and appropriate educational curricula for Africa need to take cognizance of the fact that "schooling is only one small part of how a culture inducts the young into its canonical ways" (Bruner, 1996, p. ix). In spite of the current emphasis on formal education, schooling represents only one of the resources that contribute to the wholesome development of learners. Formal educational provisions need to be integrated with other resources. More appropriate school curricula are, therefore, better designed and organized to handle school children in the "school of life" (Moumouni, 1968).

An understanding of these factors necessarily entails not only a theoretical framework, but also the relationship between education and human development.

How are Human Development and Education Related?

Throughout human history, every culture has taught its young, and has made great effort to train and prepare the next generation. The primary focus of basic education is on the developing person. The human disposition to learn from experience derives from biological integrity and maturational capacity.

Indeed, developing and learning constitute the essence of human life, which, as we stressed earlier, become more meaningful within the framework of a given cultural context. Cultures recognize, define, and assign different developmental tasks to biological development, therein infusing cultural curricula into human biological ontogeny (Nsamenang, 1992). In reality, human cultures seek to pass on from one generation to the next what they know and have learned, hoping to ensure not merely the survival and progress of their offspring, but that of their cultures as well (Reagan, 1996).

All forms of education appear to target developing persons at critical points and different stages of life. Traditional African education, for example, progresses gradually in conformity with the successive stages of physical, emotional, and mental maturation of the child (Moumouni, 1968). It interweaves social, economic, political, cultural, and existential strands of life into a common tapestry. The graduated nature of African educational thought and practice follows from the principle that, since one cannot teach or learn everything at once, the tasks and activities to be taught and learned have to be sequenced within the curriculum as well as across ontogenetic stages. They should be fitted to children's emerging minds and capacities. The schooling system, too, has been organized to correspond to the human maturational trajectory. Thus, school curricula tend to be organized to fit teaching and learning to what is perceived as the "blueprint" of biological development. Given that children learn a cultural curriculum as they develop, the cultural opportunities provided to them in, say, sub-Saharan Africa may not exactly correspond to the image of childhood and child life portrayed in the extant developmental literature. The implication is that the existing literature on human development and educational thought and practice does not reflect their nature in a global perspective.

A developmental perspective on how children make progress in understanding the world is more complex than the accumulated episodes of their learning. Human knowledge accrues from learning, albeit learning as predicated on the pace and quality of biological maturation and the existing repertoire of the child's knowledge (Fox, 1995). Other factors include the ability to manage and apply the knowledge already acquired and the extent of involvement in creative and participative learning. Often, children are active in the business of learning; they spontaneously work

out their understanding of the world rather than having to be prodded into learning through external pressure. With participatory learning, development becomes a self-regulating process, increasingly under the child's own control, and is contrasted with a view of children as passive learners, who are shaped by the learning environment (Fox, 1995). For example, when children encounter difficulties in everyday life or in school learning, they typically respond by drawing on their existing repertoire of knowledge and skills, which includes what they understand the problem to be, how important they rate its solution, what help they think is available, and whether or not they feel confident of finding a solution. This invokes the concept of readiness and highlights the futility of teaching or rushing the learning of contents for which children are not yet biologically or psychologically ready (Fox, 1995). Perhaps, it would be more productive to view readiness in terms of a gradient of difficulty with respect to a problem, necessitating the presentation of simpler forms of the problem in familiar contexts as a prerequisite for presenting more complex ones in unfamiliar environments. The family is the most familiar milieu in which children begin to acquire their knowledge.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Human infants are born into a social world constructed in terms of the social representations of adults, particularly parents. Children's search for understanding, relatedness, and competence begins in the family, with their parents, long before they start schooling. However, in many African families, participatory learning proceeds alongside didactic school learning, an existential reality that diverges from what has typically been theorized and researched. The family and the school are the key agents of socialization. Unfortunately, both these institutions are facing an acute crisis. Dedy and Tape (1991) described how musicians, novelists, and scriptwriters in Cote d'Ivoire have taken up the crisis as the central theme of their work. In tracing the evolution of the forces disabling the family and the educational constraints that have led to a crisis in the two institutions, the authors highlighted the difficulty, if not the failure, of the family and the school to play

the pivotal role of ensuring the proper socialization and education of the next generation.

The Social and Cultural Context of Human Development and Education

From a social psychological perspective, social norms, status positions and role relationships as well as the contingencies embedded in cultural institutions like the family are the primary forces that instil and shape the norms and values that regulate behaviour, and that set limits on the developing person. The development of behavioural regulation is not a process of mere accretion but an active process of increasingly internalizing and integrating external values, particularly parental injunctions, into a regulatory experience. From an evolutionary perspective, human culture permeates human adaptability to its varied ecological and cultural niches (Keller, 2000), hence the notion of contextual situativity of human behaviour. Children's recognition of social relationships and the development of the competencies to participate and become socially integrated members of the family and community implies that they have access to and can acquire the norms and values inherent therein. Indeed, human offspring possess an innate ability to acquire, create, and share culture (Trevarthen, 1980).

The family is the interactional unit that initiates and sustains children's learning and acquisition of societal values, social norms, and other interactive and communicative skills. As primary socialization agents, parents serve as the first educators of their children; they deploy socialization techniques that provide children with introductory experiences of their physical, interactive, affective, and cognitive world. Through parents, children become acquainted with the linguistic, cognitive, social, and other rule systems of the family and culture. Parents are natural teachers who first orient children to culture specific notions of individuality, relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Indeed, parents have an imperative obligation to ensure their children's acquisition of appropriate gender roles and orientation to the status positions available in their culture. In African family traditions, such parenting behaviours are embedded in a social matrix that includes siblings,

extended family members, other mentors and even neighbours. The family, the child, and the context constantly interact, thereby influencing each other.

Learning, whether in or out of school, is an active process that requires inner motivation. Development itself is an internal process in which children autonomously exercise, elaborate, and organize their capacities. Children's activities within the peer culture are illustrative of self-motivated learning. The participatory mode of indigenous African education is based on the assumption that children have innate tendencies toward being competent, affiliative, and self-regulated.

The emergence and development of the *self* is an important dimension of autonomy and relatedness. As the child elaborates a sense of *self* within the family, ideas begin to emerge and consolidate about "that which is me" and "that which is not I" (Lonner & Malpass, 1994). A child's active abstraction of a sense of identity as well as the social, affective, and cognitive rules of the culture through socialization and enculturation is a cognitive process that allows the child to progressively individuate into whom he or she is and where he or she belongs (Lewis, 1990). While this way of thinking appropriately focuses on individual agency in developmental processes, it must be emphasized that development occurs within the imperatives of a definite ecological and cultural context. The developmental context of contemporary African children is neither entirely traditional nor entirely modern, because "the old traditional ways have continuing relevance, along with the new" (Ellis, 1978, p. 7). The forces of traditionalism, modernity, and globalization thus coexist and interplay, thereby precipitating uncertainty and the attendant apprehension and anxiety.

Consequently, contemporary African societies have evolved a hybrid cultural character that is a product of the coexistence of indigenous and modern factors in the same communities and individuals. Social reality and the economic motive lie at the interface of endogenous and alien norms and value systems. In other words, human development and education are shaped by the acculturative forces and behavioural shifts incidental to Africa's triple heritage (Mazrui, 1986). This is confusing Africans, as they grope for a meaningful future and answers to the ambivalences and contradictions of their marginal existence. A conceptualization that ignores or trivializes how various strands of Africa's rich

sociocultural heritage mesh to shape and sharpen lifestyles and educational efforts portrays only a partial image.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AT THE INTERFACE OF TRADITIONALISM AND GLOBALIZATION

The forces of globalization, which is essentially Eurocentric in content and deliberate effort, are irreversibly affecting Africa's indigenous identity. The interpretation of globalization as the extent to which Western civilization changes humanity ignores or trivializes the contributions of non-Western peoples. Africans, for example, have been at the centre stage of global forces over the course of human history. A cohort on whom the future of Africa hangs, youths, are key players in the global supply of migrant labour, addictive drugs, and are used as guinea pigs for commodities of the international marketplace like cigarettes, alcohol, and sports. Their role in globalizing technologies like the Internet and the media, especially Hollywood scripts, which are simulations that place adolescent hopes and desires on edge, is also quite significant (Nsamenang, in press). The acknowledgement of such contributions per se can be empowering.

An understanding of the processes of education and the development of children in Africa today is necessarily constructivist and best undertaken within the discourse of traditionalism and postmodernism. Contemporary Africans daily navigate between the value demands and lifestyles of traditionalism and globalization. A plausible and realistic conceptual approach to this hybrid is not to pit "traditionalism" against "modernity", but to create the value on which to abstract an appropriate content from the interface of multiple images that sometimes conflict and transgress each other. This value is best crafted from the positive elements of each system. In so doing and given Africa's participatory education and agrarian economies, it is essential to understand how learners can be brought to the centre of the development process by allowing them meaningful roles in the family, society and the nation, as well as prepare them to cope and make progress with globalization.

Regardless of the persistent nostalgia for tradition or the overwhelming allure of globalization, we must resist seeing one

image as the *right* one. This calls for bringing into sharp focus stark local realities as they confront the intrusive encroachments of globalization. Educational curricula should be developed on the imperatives of both localization and globalization, necessitating global thought but localized action. The best way to understand and tackle curricular issues is to know how the young we endeavour to educate perceive and understand their circumstances and futures, and attempt to cope with their multiple and sometimes conflicting demands and role obligations.

Concluding Comments

Given that human development and education interface several disciplines of the behavioural and social sciences, education and research are best conceptualized within a multidisciplinary framework that permits several disciplines to cross-fertilize and enrich theory, method, and practice (Nsamenang, 1999). What is needed are curricula and research agendas that are grounded in our best understanding of the processes of developing and learning in context. What is lacking in curricula and research in psychology is knowledge of the methods and concepts of multiple disciplines that have a bearing on understanding human beings as organisms that acquire and use culture. Accordingly, it would be useful if methodological approaches are sensitive to how developing persons are increasingly rendered cultural agents during ontogeny.

Our theoretical position in this paper is that different cultures value and socialize diverse pathways to the human life course. This requires sensitizing educationists and social scientists to the diversity that exists to be discovered. Our concern is to train scholars in the field of culture, education and human development that are problem driven, not discipline driven, but who, nonetheless, are fortified to contribute to and advance theory and methods. The vision is to develop researchers and practitioners who understand that to become human is to acquire and create culture, and to ground them in context relevant theories and methodological techniques to actualize this vision in empirical research that utilizes both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in an interdisciplinary framework. Sensitivity to the power of participation

compels the incorporation of the voices of learners and their cultures into the discourse.

This theoretical orientation calls for the incorporation of biology in a research programme on culture and development and carries the potential of enriching both the research process and the outcome.

The foregoing discussion poignantly reinforces the need to explore African views, not so that the extant knowledge is necessarily displaced, but that we may arrive at a broader and more comprehensive understanding (Wright, 1984) of human developmental paths and educational traditions. Even if we learn that they are worthless, at least we have learned something worthwhile.

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