

Cultural Identity in an African Context: Indigenous Education and Curriculum in East Africa

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[A]t present our pupils learn to despise even their own parents because they are old-fashioned and ignorant; there is nothing in our existing educational system which suggests to the pupil that he [she] can learn important things about farming from his [her] elders. The result is that he [she] absorbs beliefs about witchcraft before he [she] goes to school, but does not learn the properties of local grasses; he [she] absorbs the taboos from his [her] family but does not learn the methods of making nutritious traditional foods. And from school he [she] acquires knowledge unrelated to agricultural life. He [she] gets the worst of both systems!

—Julius Nyerere, first president of Tanzania (1968:278)

Prior to the independence movements of the 1960s, many East Africans were socialized within indigenous contexts. At present, traditional institutions of customary law, land tenure systems, inheritance rights, and rituals are disappearing due to changes in power relations inherent in modern techno-industrial culture, resulting in the devaluing or erasure of indigenous African knowledge. Indigenous knowledge encompasses what local people know and do, and what they have known and done for generations. These practices developed through trial and error, and proved flexible enough to cope with change. Much of this knowledge, however, has never been systematically documented and is subsequently being forgotten and replaced by “modern” education and technology. “Modern” education, the formal, Western-style educational system currently in place, is associated with Western thought and is perceived by Western-oriented educators as better than indigenous knowledge, which is typically associated with folk knowledge and hence considered “inferior.” The term “indigenous” refers to the complex, culturally diverse societies of Africa which have resulted from decades of immigration

and integration. Such a complex includes Islamic traditions, which vary greatly and cannot be separated from other indigenous practices. The modern/folk dichotomy contributes to a widening gap between youth and elders in many rural African contexts and perpetuates a false perception that modernization is a unidirectional process. A curriculum which divides “indigenous” knowledge from “modern” knowledge fails to teach students about the unique cultural patterns by which people develop and advance their social worlds, and ignores the ways in which “modern” cultural beliefs and practices draw from folk and indigenous ways of life. Three decades ago, the first president of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, recognized the importance of conceptualizing folk and classroom knowledge together, yet his vision of an integrated school system has not been fully implemented.

In culturally and religiously diverse societies like Tanzania where the extended family system is giving way to urban style nuclear families, education can only be relevant if it provides individuals with the intellectual tools, moral values, and skills needed to cope with this changing situation. In many contemporary settings, however, the content and organization of curriculum are structured in ways that differ dramatically from students’ home and out-of-school experiences. In recent years, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have attempted to involve local communities in education in order to rectify this situation. Such attempts, however, raise a number of serious questions: How can schools in Africa best prepare young people academically and morally for the twenty-first century? Which communities should be involved in helping to run the schools—rural, urban, or other? How can rural indigenous communities participate in and guide the education of their children in schools within their local districts? What changes in goals and methods must indigenous forms of education and formal curricula undergo if they are to effectively develop traditional values? Can competing indigenous, Western, and Islamic forms of education prevalent in Africa today be meaningfully integrated? Answers to these questions continue to elude educational planners.¹

Drawing upon interviews and data collected during field research in Tanzania, we will illustrate and contribute to both the understanding of relevant ways to facilitate learning, and to the development of appropriate and holistic approaches for primary and secondary school curriculum in African nations (Sholle and Denski 1994:viii). A thorough evaluation of knowledge will provide an understanding of critical curriculum inquiry methods, stimulate discussion and application of person-centered educational ideas and methods, and eventually develop the tools with which to infuse this understanding into teaching practices in Tanzania. First, we examine the frameworks of curriculum inquiry and explore the approaches developed by curriculum theorists in order to formulate key questions that help guide a

critical inquiry. Second, we demonstrate the dilemmas and contradictions between indigenous and classroom educational practice by describing a case study. Third, we examine a broad definition of curriculum within which to situate some of the cultural assumptions that underlie classroom lessons and attempts to indigenize the curriculum. As will be shown in this article, schooling among the Chagga people of northern Tanzania as well as among other rural communities in East Africa exhibit a particular ideology and mix of “traditional” and “modern” ways. The difference between these two ways is more complex than many educators recognize. Further, as will be shown, there are distinctly different notions of personhood and community involved in indigenous and school knowledge. Both indigenous forms of African education and school knowledge aim to exert control over environmental and social change. They do this in surprisingly similar ways that call into question the very distinction between local “indigenous” and “school” curriculum.

Scholars have studied the underlying values and principles embedded in indigenous, Koranic, Arabic, and Western educational systems. However, few recent studies have adequately addressed the interaction between indigenous and school practices as overlapping pedagogical sites.² Scholars engaged in cross-cultural research must use ethnographic approaches to examine the culture of school as well as that of the school’s community. This broadens the understanding of how “school” knowledge intersects with “indigenous” knowledge and provides a meaningful examination of how this intersection relates to educational practices. In the field of agricultural research and extension, for example, administrators and researchers maintain that the local understanding of soil types, trees, crops, ecological changes, traditional healing, land tenure, and inheritance rights are important in sustaining local communities.³ To these administrators and researchers, characterizations of African indigenous knowledge systems as “primitive,” “unscientific,” and “wrong” are incorrect.

To most outsiders, however, indigenous knowledge remains elusive, and therefore undervalued. Educational reforms based on Western models of science and technology often fail when introduced into a new setting because the “experts” simply do not understand the people they are trying to help, and fail to account for local knowledge and attitudes. Equally difficult have been attempts to integrate indigenous, Koranic, Islamic, and Western forms of education. Even though there was a flurry of conferences and historical studies examining such integration in several African countries from the early 1970s to mid-1980s, few such efforts survived the initial euphoria.⁴ But education planners and curriculum developers need not shoulder all the blame for this failure. Even when indigenous knowledge is perceptible, it is not always understood because it is incorporated in the African way of life through experience, custom, religion, customary law,

the attitude of people toward their own lives, and the social and physical environments.⁵ Drawing from an ethnographic perspective, we will reveal the key assumptions underlying indigenous ways of teaching and demonstrate that indigenous forms of instruction are not a set of discrete, rational, systematic acts, but are rather part of dynamic alliances and competing worldviews. Further, neither indigenous nor Western forms of knowledge can be regarded as unitary “bodies” or “stocks” of knowledge. Instead, they represent contrasting epistemologies produced within sociocultural, agro-ecological, and competing political and economic settings.

Frameworks of Curriculum Inquiry

Curriculum inquiry is a method that explores the formulation and enactment of curriculum policies and programs in classroom practice. The objective of this inquiry is to examine the body of knowledge that becomes the source of learning and teaching. What is not often acknowledged in the standard application of curriculum inquiry is the tension between intended goals and those which are actually realized. Often missing in conventional positivist and phenomenological frameworks is the questioning of these intended goals. The intentions are assumed to be altruistic, noble, and neutral, therefore needing neither further inquiry nor questioning. This assumption, however, overlooks the contested nature of knowledge production and the fact that intentions represent the values, knowledge, and beliefs of curriculum developers. In an age of rapid change, the questioning of intentions is complex and daunting. Because no knowledge system can exist in a cultural, economic, or political vacuum, it is not enough to ask the valuative question, “what should be taught in our schools?” One must go further and ask related questions, such as “who should decide what is taught in the schools?”

Curriculum inquiry can assist with the identifying discrepancies between curricular *ideals*, *practices*, and the methods which could bring them closer. We question the intentions of curriculum practice and the very assumptions underlying the production and reproduction of knowledge embedded in the process of curriculum development and practice. Such a critical approach is timely and appropriate because it is broadly based on a commitment to social justice—to the ideal of justice as fairness, and the elimination of inequities and possibilities of marginalization (Rawls 1971). By combining comparative and interdisciplinary methods, African school curricula can be investigated in ways which will add to and strengthen curriculum inquiry as a form of study of what constitutes knowledge. Only when knowledge is analyzed to reveal underlying ideologies can it be both understood and practiced with clearer consequences.

Approaches to Curriculum

In taking up critical inquiry, we utilize a method which is empirical, explanatory, interpretive, deliberative, reflective, instrumental, and action-oriented in the manner described by Paulo Freire (1970) and other curriculum developers. Michael Apple and L. Christian-Smith, for example, explore the questions of “what knowledge” and “whose knowledge” is of most worth (1991:46). They provide a coherent and compelling critique of “official” knowledge and the way it is constructed and conveyed in the curriculum and the classroom. They insist that what counts as legitimate knowledge is the result of complex power relations and struggles among identifiable class, race, gender, and religious groups (1991:66).

Apple and others such as John Goodlad and Elliot Eisner consider curriculum design in the African context to be a complex mix of a comprehensive body of content and activities that have both implicit and explicit consequences for learners, educators, families, and societies.⁶ We argue that curriculum includes not only content, but also how knowledge is organized, the purposes and functions of schools and schooling, how teachers teach, how learners learn, and how the whole is evaluated with regard to the ways in which educational resources such as knowledge, time, expertise, and money are distributed (Eisner 1975:11–13). By using this critical inquiry method, educational theorists have developed a set of questions (that are not listed in this article due to space constraints) to guide research. Using these questions as a guideline, we examine indigenous knowledge and classroom practice within two pedagogic domains: farming practices and issues of home economics. These “applied sciences” may not represent the most “important” subjects taught in schools. Yet the detachment of these “applied sciences” from “academic” courses, and the cultural significance of land and food in many African contexts, makes an exploration of these valuable as it could provide insight into the cultural dimensions of schooling. For this reason, we focus on these subjects and on the beliefs and practices of young adults, rather than on the technical processes that are managed by education specialists.

Using the critical and normative perspectives described above, our observations draw from a body of work that attempts to bring some of the concepts of critical theory to the level of critical practice in African schools such that educators become consciously and actively involved in their own processes of school improvement and evaluation.⁷ Teachers who reflect and gain a consciousness of their own practices may question how their political opinions, religious beliefs, gender roles, ethnic identities, professions, and the subjects they teach have been influenced by the dominant culture, whether indigenous or Western. Teachers who question and reflect on these issues can help students understand how knowledge is created and influenced by factors of race, ethnicity, gender, and social class.

Case Study: Indigenous Education in Tanzania

The excerpt quoted at the outset of this article speaks to the central dilemma we seek to understand. From birth, Africans are immersed in a cultural setting that values the authority of elders and emphasizes practical knowledge. However, classroom lessons frequently have little relevance to life in African villages. Students are schooled in a system that devalues and undermines the authority of elders. This dilemma has not been resolved since Nyerere's time, and has become further entrenched in the system of schooling. It is at the crux of national and international debates about whether schooling can dissipate ethnic and cultural conflict, and it is at the heart of discussions about the possibility of indigenous communities effectually participating in their own education programs.

To illustrate the point that schooling occurs within a cultural framework that extends beyond an official curriculum or syllabus, we draw upon examples from the social life of the Chagga people, who live on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro. We discuss the ways in which schooling relates to wider aspects of the Chagga lifestyle, and consider how particular subjects, specifically *kilimo* (agriculture) and home economics, are treated in primary and secondary school programs. We then discuss the ways in which these subjects relate to Chagga ideas about land and domestic relations.

It is important to first provide some demographic and historical information about the Chagga people. The more than one million people who reside on the slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro live in closely spaced homesteads extending between the elevations of 2,000 and 4,000 feet above sea level. In pre-colonial times, the population was divided into about thirty distinct chiefdoms or territories. First the Germans and later the British consolidated these systems into a few administrative units by setting up the Mangi Mkuu (paramount chief) as a native ruler of the Wachagga of Kilimanjaro. German missionaries established the first schools on Mount Kilimanjaro in the late nineteenth century, and introduced the Chagga to a cash economy and to the techniques of coffee cultivation. By the early twentieth century, schooling was an important way for the Chagga people to enter and control the expanding political economy and for chiefs to redefine their political power.

Currently, education in Tanzania is highly valued as a human resource and as a means for upward social mobility. Primary schooling is the major educational experience for students in Tanzania, though the number of students admitted to the secondary level has been increasing yearly. In 1993, for example, nearly twenty percent of all students beginning secondary school were admitted into Form 1 (equivalent to ninth grade in the U.S.A.); in contrast, only fifteen percent were admitted into Form 1 in 1988, and five percent in 1984 (Ministry of Education and Culture 1992:11). Educational

policies at both primary and secondary levels stress the development of practical skills as well as classroom study. In 1967, Nyerere stated that primary and secondary schooling must “prepare young people for the work they will be called upon to do in the society which exists in Tanzania” (1968:274). This work was to develop the rural sector by, among other things, training primary and secondary school students in agriculture and other practical skills.

Nyerere’s program of schooling, which he named famously “Education for Self-Reliance” [ESR], remains central to formal education in Tanzania today. Both primary and secondary schools stress the need to develop technical skills in kilimo, *Elimu ya Maarifa ya Nyumbani* (home economics), and *Ufundi* (mechanics). Until recently, students qualifying for higher education were required to either work for specified periods of time or go to national service for one year before entering the more advanced certificate, diploma, and degree programs. These advanced programs focus on scientific and technical disciplines rather than on liberal arts. The official intention, as initially stipulated in the Musoma resolution and later in *Siasa ni Kilimo* (Politics in Agriculture), was to develop a skilled labor force while at the same time preventing the growth of an educated elite class with no experience or interest in manual labor.⁸

One of the most important components of the Musoma Resolution, and of the earlier policy *Elimu ya Kujitegemea* (“vocationally” oriented education that was the basis for Education for Self-Reliance), is the compulsory inclusion of agricultural science into school curricula. Primary and secondary school students are required to spend a portion of their time at school engaged in agricultural labor. Primary school students spend roughly two hours each week in the classroom learning about planting techniques and plant types, whereas secondary school students spend roughly seven to ten hours per week in the classroom studying soil science, animal science, crop science, rural economics, socialist production, agro-mechanics, and agro-techniques. In addition to classroom lessons on agriculture, the ESR and the Musoma resolution stipulate that students develop and work on school gardens or farms. As a consequence, most contemporary primary schools have a small garden that students cultivate. Secondary schools have a larger plot of land on which students produce food for their own consumption and sale. Profits from the sale of produce (maize, beans, tomatoes, spinach) usually subsidize school lunches, supplies, tuition, and school. Through this combination of classroom lessons and practical instruction, official policies aim to teach students self-reliance. As the secondary school syllabus states, one of the aims of kilimo is to “make pupils appreciate and adopt better agricultural practices including the keeping of farm records and the running of school shops” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1976:3).

In a similar manner, lessons on home economics aim “to provide the pupils with knowledge and skills which will enable them to raise their standard of living, make them competent homemakers, happy and well-balanced citizens who are creative and know how to use their leisure time usefully” (1976:63). Home economics, a counterpart to kilimo, is likewise taught to primary and secondary school students through a combination of classroom lessons and practical activities. Lessons on home economics at the primary level include topics on Dental Hygiene, Personal Grooming, Housekeeping, and Nutrition. At the secondary level, Form 1 and 2 students study General Housecraft and Cookery for the first half of the year, and Textiles and Dressmaking for the second half. Form 2 students also study Mothercraft (childcare), while Form 3 and 4 students study either Nutrition and Cooking or Textiles and Dressmaking, depending on a teacher’s preference. Although technically the Ministry of Education has specified that both boys and girls ought to learn the basics of home economics, schoolteachers and administrators continue to associate home economics with the sexual and domestic education of girls. Some teachers feel these lessons should be taught by women. Thus, home economics is, in many ways, a gendered counterpart to agricultural science, although, as with agricultural science, it is studied by both boys and girls.

As with kilimo, students of home economics engage in a number of practicals throughout the year that complement their classroom instruction. Primary school students, for example, apply their housekeeping lessons by cleaning and sweeping their classrooms and the teachers’ staff room each day. The more advanced Form 3 and 4 students produce clothing for themselves, and Form 2 students prepare first aid kits for the school and home. Form 1 students are taught how to prepare and serve different types of breakfast foods. Each of these practicals is intended to provide students with specific skills so that they can “become self-reliant economically as individuals; increase the family’s income. . . . increase the country’s economy; [and] guide others to live a better life” (Ministry of Education and Culture 1976:63). Interestingly, many of the lessons taught in both agricultural science and home economics intersect with what students already know from learning how to farm and cook at home. The lessons do, however, sometimes overlap in contradictory ways which discount or validate the values and beliefs that students have learned at home. To illustrate this distinction, we will now examine briefly indigenous Chagga notions of farming and home economics and how they compare with the cultural assumptions of school lessons.

Chagga Notions of Land as Compared to Agricultural Science

According to elders as well as archival and ethnographic records, Chagga society was, and still is, highly stratified and hierarchical. In pre-colonial times, the *Mangi* (chief) and his royal court controlled the movement of goods and people in and out of the Chagga territories. These *Wamangi* (chiefs) were identified by their extraordinary capacity to control rains and communicate with the deity *Ruwa*. *Wamangi* and village elders were extremely important in controlling water sources, preventing deforestation, overseeing the agricultural landscaping, terracing cultivated land, and trying to prevent soil erosion, overcultivation, and overproduction.

More recently, however, the power of royal authorities over land and agricultural production has given way to new ideas about productivity embodied in the ideals of “agricultural science.” These newer ways emphasize the bureaucratic management of the land through persons of appointed (not hereditary) offices and emphasize the abilities of individuals (not chiefs) to decide when to plant, how to terrace, and where to channel water. Consider, for instance, that the official secondary school syllabus divides agricultural instruction into “theoretical” and “practical” lessons. After four years of secondary schooling, Tanzanian students are expected to have attended 640 classroom lessons that pertain to agricultural science, and 1,344 practical lessons that involve hands-on activities on the farm. Farming in primary schools is less extensive, yet even there, students in Standards V–VII (equivalent to fifth through seventh grade in the U.S.A.) are required to have spent more than 200 classroom lessons in kilimo each year and an even greater amount of time spent working the school garden.

Judging from our observations and experiences, few primary or secondary schools follow this schedule precisely. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the difference between the way time and activities are structured inside and outside of school indicates the different worlds in which Chagga youth live. Children who tend goats or guard maize fields from destruction by birds or monkeys do so in the context of seasonal changes and social rhythms which correspond to other events and activities in their lives. They do not attend to their daily activities according to an hourly clock or pre-set schedule, as do children in school, nor do they necessarily distinguish between “theoretical” and “practical” lessons. Instead, they learn in a holistic fashion that differs from the way knowledge is taught in school. Youths who learn how to farm by tending goats and guarding maize fields are both participants and observers in the process of learning about agricultural societies. They learn through experience and practice rather than through the technical processes which are emphasized by education specialists.

A common complaint of people living on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro is that students are taught how to become local "experts" in agricultural science. Many complain that students learn to view their parents as out-dated relics who do not know how to live or manage a farm in the late twentieth century. They also complain that school has robbed elders of their deserved respect and authority. Indeed, the transfer of authority from elders to teachers is arguably the single most erosive feature of schooling. Agricultural science detaches school-aged children from the cohesive unit of the village community, in which age and hierarchy are an important feature. Their education positions them as authorities in farming over and above their parents and grandparents, even though ultimate authority over the land remains with elders.

This widening gap between elders and students is accompanied by the restructuring of gendered divisions of labor. In the past, women and girls marketed agricultural produce. Today, men and boys transport and sell crops. Many of the Chagga people associate these changes with lessons learned at school and with the effects of the curriculum on girls' and boys' traditional roles. According to the gendered division of labor at school, girls are responsible for hoeing and weeding the fields and for harvesting and processing maize in preparation for storage. Boys, on the other hand, are responsible for slashing and burning the fields, loading the harvested crops onto pickup trucks, transporting them back to the school compound, and selling the produce in near and distant markets. This gendered division of labor reflects a shift from what many Chagga recognize as "tradition" and contributes to the general sentiment that schooling disrupts many longstanding social relations. Some parents protest that boys are taking over jobs traditionally performed by girls, and that girls and women are losing some control over their social and economic autonomy by conceding a degree of agricultural production and sales to boys and men.

Such complaints might be partially addressed by a school system in which elders' authority is reintroduced into the curriculum and in which traditional gender roles are acknowledged and accommodated. But this potential solution is complicated by the fact that teachers are not always native to the local community and are not always aware of the local agricultural practices. Yet as a first step, educators could invite elders into the classroom to rehearse for students the lessons they learned about kilimo, or they could invite village elders to serve as agricultural science assistants or teachers. Rather than contrast the "scientific" way of farming with the "traditional" way students' parents and grandparents farmed, it is more advantageous to find the points of commonality between the two systems and to emphasize how both have ways for controlling water sources, preventing deforestation, landscaping, terracing, fertilizing, harvesting, and

dividing labor by gender. Another measure might involve the training of teachers by elders and the transfer of elders' knowledge to their juniors. Such a step would begin to break down the antagonistic barriers currently separating teachers from village elders. It would also create a forum in which discussions about "traditional" and "scientific" methods of farming would generate new ways of farming and engage students in kilimo.

Chagga Initiation Lessons in Relation to Home Economics

Indigenous Chagga education includes a core set of lessons that integrates children and youth into the adult community. Among the Chagga of Tanzania, for instance, there is a "course" for children known as *mtato* ("imitative play") in which children portray the roles of adults; through this role-playing they become familiar with the behavior and attitudes expected from them as future members of society. Lessons from *mtato* are taught more systematically in other venues, such as on occasions when individuals are ushered into adulthood through rites of passage (a period known as *jando na unyago*, initiation practices). One of the central features of initiation lessons in the past was the ritual seclusion of initiates in *iwaa* (special camps), where children on the path to adulthood learned about matters of procreation, parenting, and domestic life. Boys gathered in a cleared area of the forest in groups of as many as thirty or forty, and learned how to construct houses, organize domestic spaces, store foods, defend against theft, and procreate with their future wives in such a way as to ensure conception. Girls gathered in smaller groups of fours or fives in the house of a ritual teacher and learned how to cook for their future husbands, prepare certain foods and medicines which ensured fertility or prevented pregnancy, maintain standards of hygiene, and feed and care for children. Both groups were instructed by village elders who quizzed and drilled them about their respective lessons. These lessons, although quite different in content from those taught in school, overlap with some of the lessons taught in home economics.

Most notably, home economics and initiation lessons both address common issues of nutrition, commensal etiquette, and cooking. They are training courses for youth becoming adults. Both involve conveying to young adults the values and beliefs of an adult community interested in reproducing itself socially. As with initiation, home economics presents students with information about eating etiquette, serving norms, homemaking, and fine cookery. Girls in the past, for instance, learned to prepare a mixture of fat, blood, and *mlaso* (milk) for women to consume after childbirth in order to make them strong and to make their milk flow; today's students of home economics learn about the best nutrients and foods for pregnant and lactating women and their offspring, including bottle formula and vitamin supplements.

Furthermore, girls at home learned how to use a *kipekecho* (a three pronged “spoon” used to mix porridge and banana beer), whereas girls at school learn how to use electric mixers and egg beaters, even though most do not have access to such equipment at home. In a similar fashion, girls and boys of the past learned which portions of slaughtered animals were socially appropriate to offer persons of particular ranks; students of home economics today also learn to serve foods in a particular way. For instance, young men learned that the *kidari* (breast portion) of a slaughtered animal was properly served to the male head of a sublineage or lineage and that the *ngari* (middle ribs and rump) are reserved for the second rank of men in the hierarchy (see Moore 1986:340–41, 373; see also footnote 10). Today, students learn that rump roasts and tenderloin cuts are the choicest meats to serve guests and that male elders need not be distinguished from others in the lineage by the choice of meat given. Indeed, one of the problems some elders identify with home economics is that students learn Western ways of preparing food which, intentionally or unintentionally, undermine Chagga traditions. Instead of serving lungs and part of the head and ribs to adult women (as Chagga would have done in the past), students either discard these “inedible” portions of the animal (particularly when in the presence of Westerners) or they serve every guest indiscriminately: men, women, and children alike receive portions from the same cut. They are not differentiated in rank by the size of the portion given. This indifference undermines what many elders consider “tradition.” It affronts adult sensibilities and reinforces many elders’ views that students are taught practices, beliefs, and values in the classroom that contradict Chagga ideals.

As with kilimo lessons, classes about home economics are taught not by village elders who are associated with the control of ritual knowledge, but by young teachers. Indeed, parents frequently say that one of the reasons their sons and daughters do not know the basic rules of etiquette, such as how to keep house or care for children, is because students’ teachers are “only children themselves” who do not know how to incorporate “traditional” domestic practices with the “scientific” way taught in home economics classes today. There are, of course, some attempts in the school curriculum to integrate local and school knowledge. In lessons about commensal manners, for instance, the official secondary school syllabus indicates that teachers should “stress...good traditional table manners” in addition to teaching students how to eat with knives and forks (Ministry of Education and Culture 1976:130). In lessons about legumes and cereals, it instructs teachers to help students prepare local foods such as *nswaouru* (millet porridge, a Chagga dish) and *bajia* (fried legume balls, a Hindi dish) in addition to preparing foreign dishes such as oatmeal or peanut butter sandwiches. These attempts are, however, usually only superficial.

As illustrated by the case study, current school curricula contrast greatly with traditional forms of education, and represents a move away from the social, cultural, and historical context of the community in the teaching of young people. By revising a curriculum that enables students to think critically about the lessons they are learning and to integrate “theoretical” lessons with “practical” lessons, the school system might be able to better base its own authority on categories and beliefs that are meaningful and useful to local people, rather than only on tenets and theories that are meaningful to education specialists. It may even be possible to reintroduce elders’ authority into the educational setting by framing indigenous knowledge in a more positive, constructive light, rather than framing it as superstitious or backward. Such steps would erode some of the barriers that have separated school-based knowledge from “traditional” knowledge learned at home. Both initiation practices *and* home economics exert control over social reproduction and change. Similarly, both agricultural science lessons *and* children’s goat-tending and farming chores aim to exert a degree of control over the environment. By emphasizing points of intersection between indigenous knowledge and official curriculum rather than seeing these forms of knowledge as antithetical, one might begin to rebuild an educational system in which knowledge is integrated with experience, and learning is an on-going activity.

Indigenizing and Integrating the Curriculum

An important area where researchers could seek information and knowledge valuable for indigenizing the curriculum is communal education. For many Tanzanians, the community is a principal educator, as implied in the African adage: “It takes a village to raise a child.” This proverb is further illustrated by the maxim: “One white ant does not build an ant hill” that reflects the tradition of community involvement in providing education. The assumption is that when learning is matched with local needs, education, whether indigenous or formal, can have a galvanizing effect on the lives of the learners. To reevaluate community involvement is one strategy for acknowledging the impact of culture on people, history, knowledge, and experiences. This can be realized when individuals, families, communities, and indigenous teachers all have the opportunity to participate in formulating curriculum policies, developing curriculum programs, and implementing these policies and programs. With such participatory practice, community members would ensure sensitivity to traditional customs and social norms, leading to a more culturally appropriate formal education. Yet, because community involvement is complex, few attempts have been made in contemporary Africa to indigenize or integrate the curriculum.

Nyerere's national effort at indigenization, the Education for Self Reliance (ESR), aimed to localize the curriculum in Tanzania by emphasizing practical, rural oriented education as a primary focus. Yet the program did not meaningfully integrate the curriculum because, for one, it ignored Islamic forms of education, an important part of everyday life in many urban communities. Instead ESR considered such practices as "personal" religious beliefs and dismissed them as a legitimate site of common curriculum. It is presumed that Nyerere's fear of integrating Islamic forms of education into ESR stemmed not from his fear of an unintended religious conflict between Moslems and Christians. Being a Christian himself, Nyerere saw the danger of splitting the nation into religious factions which were prevalent in other countries at the time, and tried to avoid it by establishing constitutional guarantees to separate government from religion (Nyerere 1995:10; Legum and Mmari 1995:126-28). Even though religious education was allowed in the schools as a subject taught by priests and Moslem clerics, Nyerere did not want the new nation of Tanzania to be affiliated with any one religious group. Until today, the question of the integration of indigenous, Western, and Islamic forms of education has not been addressed. Many feel that it is better left alone than confronted.

Despite his shortcomings, Nyerere's ideals about indigenizing education were radical and echoed the climate of educational reform taking place elsewhere in Africa at that time, particularly the West African countries of Nigeria and Ghana. Elsewhere, though much later, conferences, study seminars, and high-level government discussions about reintroducing indigenous education into formal schooling were undertaken in many countries including Botswana, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Zaire, and Zimbabwe. But nowhere has the "traditional" African education component become apparent in policy documents like it was in ESR.

Attempts to implement such radical educational reforms have been the biggest challenge to African educators, despite the fact that many educators believe a formal education system can play an important role in Africa and that formal education must meet the cultural, social, moral, intellectual, political, and economic needs of Africa. Why has integration posed such a challenge? Why have these intentions thus far eluded curriculum practitioners? What are the obstacles to such desired integration? Previous works have identified these obstacles to be: (1) a lack of political will to deal with the contradictions between intentions and practice, which are reflected in shallow curricular reforms based on unrealistic national projection of educational programs; (2) dependence on foreign assistance in fiscal planning; (3) continued reliance on macro planning which ignores population growth, basic needs, indigenous knowledge, and disparities in regional, urban, rural, and remote areas; (4) the use of inappropriate research methods; and

(5) callous attitudes toward colonial and historical legacies (Semali 1993:193–206). In order for attempts to indigenize the curriculum to succeed, some of these obstacles must be overcome.

The kilimo and domestic science education program described above provides clues to what reforms need to be implemented. Even though these courses were conceptualized as practical subjects, they did not provide for practical application in the village. From textbooks to teachers, to what it means to be a Tanzanian “wife” or “husband,” the courses did not help students apply what they had learned to the context in which they grew up. Instead, the approach emphasized universal stocks of knowledge which were to be learned, memorized, and eventually regurgitated at the time of national examination. Missing was a curriculum design that incorporated traditional practices such as child-rearing, learning through play, and initiation into adulthood. Moreover, the use of traditional pedagogical methods was extremely weak. It is imperative that planners direct their curriculum design efforts towards a new way of knowledge production, not as abstract knowledge to be memorized, but towards practical application.

A second issue is whether curriculum planners further subjugate or help redress the imbalance placed on the two types of knowledge. The unfortunate dependence on donor countries for textbooks, teachers, and lab materials perpetuates the colonial legacy of dependency, which in turn weakens research into indigenous education and the alienation of African intellectuals from their own culture. One place to start the decolonization of knowledge is for administrators and government agents to encourage curriculum developers to begin a new path that departs from foreign ideas of what is important at the local level. Continuing to ignore local knowledge resources only perpetuates colonial legacies and maintains oppressive knowledge systems.

Furthermore, curriculum designers must recognize that models of education borrowed from other African cultures can be as oppressive as Western models. The “uniqueness” of indigenous knowledge to a given culture does not necessarily imply internal consensus or that everybody who belongs to that culture shares the same knowledge base. Planners must, therefore, acknowledge the intra-cultural influences which would make indigenous knowledge less “unique.” Teachers must expose students to different cultural perspectives as part of their history and heritage, rather than ignoring diverse cultural perspectives.

It will be a stretch to expect outsiders, including executives of foreign textbook companies, who barely know the local cultures and languages to incorporate into textbooks African folklore, stories, and metaphors which accurately capture local imagery, meaning, and values. While this may be tricky to the novice curriculum planner, it is important to remember that

attempts at curriculum reconstruction in Africa must be reconceptualized as a process rather than a technique or method. The application of curriculum must not be conceptualized as abstract or universal knowledge, but rather as practical applications of knowledge in the local community where indigenous knowledge systems become rationalized and strategically employed to the local community's advantage. Curriculum should include local history, languages, metaphors, and folklore to nurture and support cultural identity. Unless courses taught in classrooms genuinely commit to the local context, and unless "school" curriculum allows for multiple perspectives including the local community's inputs; "school" knowledge will inevitably become marginal and unusable, subjugating the minds it intends to free.

Demise of the Role of Community

Another important facet is the role of local community as an important indigenous institution, a role which cannot be overlooked or dismissed as insignificant. Unfortunately, the traditional role played by the community—contributing to the well-being of individuals—is in decline. This role is waning and is perhaps disappearing partly because of its continued de-emphasis in postcolonial curricula, the introduction of market economies and competition, and a fear of strengthening cultural plurality over nationhood and nation building efforts. What is not readily acknowledged is that the local community has for many years been at the center of preserving and strengthening the cultural, social, and moral norms of society. Much of this traditional legacy is acknowledged, however, by several NGOs interested in reversing the trend. Following the 1990 Jomtien Conference, there is discussion in many quarters today about community involvement in education which is currently being promoted by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Unfortunately, apart from these agencies, current curriculum planning rarely offers an opportunity for parents, communities, or local elders to help design curricula or education policies. These exercises continue to be left to curriculum experts. Even at the local level, parents' input on curriculum issues, school management, or choice of textbooks is hardly acknowledged or even desired.

Furthermore, even though there seem to be more opportunities now than there were before independence to integrate these two systems of education, many critics doubt whether a meaningful integration is possible. They suggest that the attempt to blend local knowledge with existing "scientific" or formal school procedures falsely assumes that indigenous education systems represent an easily-definable body of knowledge ready for extraction and incorporation.

Ultimately, the problem lies partly in a hesitation or ambivalence to introduce meaningful integration of indigenous and Western forms of education for fear that this would disrupt the balance of power within the constituent groups in the African society. Any imbalance of power between ethnic groups is perceived to be a threat to peace in the post-independence era.⁹ The fear of this threat has paralyzed attempts to introduce indigenous languages, themes, ideas, or traditional practices into schools that could be identified with any one dominant group. A related idea is the assumption that traditional teachers have little or nothing to contribute to improving the knowledge base of the community, and that what they know is so localized that it is of no apparent value outside the immediate community. This kind of thinking, however, has little substance, and is based on the fear that the powerless will reclaim power. There is a reluctance, if not resistance by many, to acknowledge that there are different cultures within the nation-state which warrant greater understanding and inclusion. There seems to be a notion that acknowledging the existence of different cultures with differing opinions will create a great divide. This fear results in the marginalization of different cultural groups and a minimizing of dialogues and exchanges between all groups.

Conclusions

This article documents the interplay between indigenous (local) education and modern (Western) curriculum practice in schools. It raises important questions that hinge upon cultural identity at a time of economic and educational globalization. We explored the relevance and role of education in providing individuals with the intellectual tools, communicative competencies, ethical commitments, and skills needed to cope with changing realities in contemporary Tanzania. We pointed out the need to reexamine present curriculum practices and the need to question underlying intentions, interests, and ideologies. The pyramidal colonial educational system established during the period prior to independence created a grave imbalance in the distribution of opportunities for education. In the post-colonial era, however, “modern” industrial culture must come to terms with the conditioning inherent in its educational system that contributes to the loss of African traditional communal living, because this loss may ultimately lead to social, cultural, and ecological catastrophe. The impending loss should be a key concern of every African (Bowers 1993). This article is therefore a call for Africans and Africanists to examine the cultural assumptions which underlie the mounting problems of African societies.

The complexity of the African reality described in this case study has led us to be cautious in reaching any conclusions about the power of

educational systems to contribute miraculously to the formation of a new person, a transformed political culture, or a mode of economic success. Instead, aspects of African communal education were singled out as a place to begin the reevaluation of indigenous knowledge and curriculum practice, and also to call into question the distinction between "indigenous" and "school" curriculum.

As African educators search and strive to establish inclusive models of democratic communities, they challenge pressing problems of economic liberalization and the democratization of political systems. Such a process of democratization involves a redefinition of knowledge such that the local and diverse are both valued as legitimate forms. Local and diverse knowledge are viewed as indispensable because they are rooted in the community from which they arise. Being contextualized, local knowledge is concrete and part of what is real to those who live in the local communities. On the other hand, globalization and the universalization of "modern" knowledge are mere abstractions which have violated the "concrete" and hence the "real" (Shiva 1989:60). From a critical standpoint, "modern" (dominant) pedagogy is inadequate, because it is "normalizing" and "controlling." Its impetus is not toward a democratic curriculum, one that encourages active subjects who grapple with the "concrete" problems of social and personal life (Sholle and Denski 1994:76). This is important because cultural identity does not operate outside one's social context.

We reiterate here what others have pleaded as the most urgent task: positively valuing indigenous or local knowledge systems (Johnson 1992). This includes efforts to document local ways of knowing in order to promote African cultural heritage, particularly the successful ways in which indigenous people have dealt with their environment. As African educators search for a more holistic approach to curriculum practice, many seek to develop a practice that is not fragmented by modern techno-industrial culture. They must confront the nagging questions squarely: How much control do Africans have over the production of their own identities? To what extent do they consciously and knowingly participate in defining themselves? What contributions have they made to global knowledge that continues to be ignored? The outcome must be a reconceptualized curriculum practice that is inclusive, democratic, and acknowledges individuals' African heritages, experiences, and identities. These changes must be cultivated and grounded in local ways of being, knowing, and thinking.

Notes

1 Some of the ideas developed here were presented at the 1995 annual conference of the Comparative and International Society, Boston, Massachusetts, March 29–April 1. We are grateful to many colleagues for their critiques, challenges, and advice. This work is part of a larger project undertaken in Tanzania consisting of ethnographic interviews and survey data collected between 1988–1993. The authors wish to thank their sponsors, Pennsylvania State University and Spencer Foundation and the University of Chicago for providing research and write-up support, and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology for the permission to conduct research in Tanzania.

2 See Wangoola n.d.; Shaw 1990.

3 P. Wangoola of the African Association of Literacy and Adult Education describes the emergence of NGOs and social movements in sub-Saharan Africa: “As the neo-colonial state decays and abandons its responsibilities to the people on the directives of the IMF and the World Bank, the people have had to respond by organizing themselves for survival and self-preservation, while figuring out long-term solutions. This explains the rapid growth of peasant and workers associations, welfare organizations, mutual aid societies, harambee groups and the indigenous African development organizations and NGO’s” (cited in K. Mundy 1993:410).

4 It is important at this point to note that “indigenizing” the curriculum refers to the reintroduction of indigenous practices into the school system and a de-emphasis of Western education, while “integrating” the curriculum refers to a curriculum design that reflects multiple forms of knowledge.

5 The term “school curriculum” has been adopted in this article to reflect the work of formal curriculum reconstruction in post-colonial Africa, mainly as content extensively found in textbooks, syllabi, policy documents, and teachers’ resource materials. Aspects of “indigenous” curriculum refer to informal curriculum of traditional skill training taking place in African local communities and characterized by folklore, story-telling by parents, grandparents, or elders from the family and clan.

6 The two exceptions here are Daun 1992, and Stairs and Pephrah 1994.

7 Some investigation has been possible thanks to the concept of cognitive anthropology, or “ethnoscience,” in which a culture’s perception of its universe is studied through its language. Used extensively in the 1970s by Scribner and Cole, this method has not gained wide diffusion because it requires an in-depth knowledge of vernacular speech, which few researchers have. However, many basic questions remain unanswered. See Thomas 1993; Becker and Horowitz 1972; Oliver and Gershman 1994; Cajete 1994.

8 In the past ten years there has been extensive research in this area expanding the whole spectrum of agricultural extension, health care, and traditional medicine.

See for example: Connwall, Guijit, and Welbourn 1994; Brokensha and Warren 1980; Atte 1992; P. Mundy 1993; Warren and Rajasekaran 1993. In the area of traditional medicine, see also Bannerman, Burton, and Wen-Chieh 1983; Dennis 1985. Also, an important contribution has been made by Shiva 1989.

9 This article has benefited from insights exemplified by: Erny 1981; Fafunwa and Aisiku 1982; The ASUK 1968; Eshiwani 1993; Prewitt 1971.

10 There is a growing body of literature on the subject of indigenous knowledge. The Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Rural Development at Iowa State University has helped set up a network of global, regional, and national centers aimed at addressing theoretical problems and practical tasks of recovering invaluable indigenous wisdom and perceptions.

11 This critique undermines the assumption of a positivist view of curriculum inquiry that sees knowledge as a tangible stock or store to be tapped, extracted, and documented. The process of knowing should be seen as engaged, value-bound, and context determined, rather than detached, value free, and independent of context. It is also essential to ask how power affects knowledge. Michel Foucault observes that "the criteria of what constitutes knowledge, what is to be excluded and who is designated as qualified to know involves actions of power" (Foucault 1971). Norman Long and Magdalena Villareal point out that "power differences and struggles over social meaning are central to an understanding of knowledge processes" (Long and Villareal 1994:41).

12 Typically, conventional forms of inquiry, whether of the positive/post-positivist ideology or phenomenological persuasions, attempt to position knowers apart from ideology and human interests. Positivist/post-positivist approaches (experimental and quasi-experimental studies, correlational studies, survey studies, and the like) go even further: they attempt to position knowers apart from what is to be known, principally through the techniques of operational defining and measurement. However, phenomenological approaches, (like ethnography, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism) eschew attempts to objectify knowledge and rely more on the intersubjectivity inherent in humans trying to understand affairs that are human. All of these curriculum frameworks can engage productive inquiry and produce useful knowledge, but they do not provide a sufficient epistemology or methodology for *using* knowledge.

13 The critical approach of seeking patterns in each subject matter, language, and new action or innovation in the repetition of past patterns of culture, histories, and experiences has now been adopted by a generation of social theorists from Foucault to Bourdieu, and Giddens to Habermas. See for example, Foucault 1971 and 1973; Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979 and 1987; Habermas 1984, 1987, and 1992.

14 See Goodlad and Keating 1990; Goodlad 1979; Eisner 1975 and 1985.

15 See Sirotnik and Oakes 1986; Sirotnik 1991 and 1992.

16 The Musoma Resolution directed accelerated progress toward universal primary education by 1977, the elimination of illiteracy by 1980, and self-sufficiency in high-level skills by 1980. It also instituted *Elimu ya Kujitegemea* ("vocationally oriented education) in all secondary schools and required village or factory work experience and party endorsement for admission into university. The *Siasa ni Kilimo* (Politics in Agriculture) policy stated that "in [the] future, the Party will ensure that the Government and its instruments, in practice and concretely, implement fully their role of servicing and propelling the development of agriculture, socialist agriculture being given top priority..." (CCM 1981). Recent multi-party and liberalization policies have relaxed many of these requirements, but the Ujamaa legacy persists.

17 See Nyerere 1968.

18 See Fafunwa and Aisiku 1982: Chapter 1.

19 The World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) was held in Jomtien, Thailand from March 5–9, 1990. The World Conference on Education for All was sponsored by the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, and UNESCO.

20 In the African context, Nelson Kasfir echoes what Samuel Huntington and Naomi Chazan and others have argued: departicipation is conducive to political modernization, and high rates of participation may lead to more polarized factions and civil war. See Kasfir 1973; Huntington 1968; Chazan 1982.

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