

LEARNING

Edited by
A.O.U. ONUKA

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Edited by A.O.U. Onuka

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First Published 2013

ISBN 978 - 978 - 50632 - 7 - 4

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Published by
Society for the Promotion of Academic
Research Excellence (SPARE)

Printed by
Printon Graphic Press, Ibadan
Tel: 07030 29911

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Society for the Promotion of Academic and
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Printed by
Esthom Graphic Prints, Mokola, Ibadan
Tel: 07030298365

Learning – A book in Honour of
PROF. TOLULOPE WALE YOLOYE

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ONE CHILD, TWO CULTURES: EXPLORING THE PROSPECTS OF EXPOSING NIGERIAN CHILDREN TO TWO MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE CULTURES

Odinko, Monica

Introduction

Culture consists of concepts, values, and assumption about life that guide behaviour and is widely shared by people. This is transmitted from generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions, by parents, siblings and other significant others. Culture is the learned behaviour patterns that are characteristic of the members of any given society. It includes what a group of people makes its customs - language, material, artefacts, and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. According to Damen (1987), culture consists of the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. To him, through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to the society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions. Culture could be learned and shared. Culture appears to be mankind's primary adaptive mechanism. Culture is synonymous to education.

Education should encourage total change in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor behaviours of the learner. Emphasising on these three domains where behaviour modifications are necessary is important because such behaviour attainment could help the individual to understand, participate actively in any environment one finds oneself, appreciate, relate with people and perform activities that would lead to ones survival. It thus appears then that exposing the Nigerian child to both indigenous as well as western education could help the child to adapt easily in the contemporary world.

The total view of culture in this paper does not mean that the Nigerian child should be subjected to or obliged to be exposed to every single cultural activity in the western world. The writer thus, draws attention to specific form of cultural expression. In this work, attention will be paid on how Nigerian children learn in the western culture of the school as well as that of the traditional societies. This paper also looked into the prospects of exposing Nigerian children in their early years to two mutually exclusive

cultures (Western and Nigerian traditional education culture). The author further analysed the factors that made the two cultures mutually exclusive. Prominent among the factors is pedagogy as well as goals of such exposures. Thus, the study looked into the pedagogical components of the two cultures and further discussed the benefits accruing to exposing Nigerian children early enough to these two cultures.

The researcher is of the view that western school culture with respect to teaching children is characterized by predetermined programmes of curriculum and events whereas that of the Nigerian traditional cultural exposure is spontaneous, with more risk taking and competitiveness which leads to creativity. In the end, such exposure of Nigerian children to these two distinct but mutually exclusive trainings could enable Nigerian children adjust easily to westernized culture as well as lead a fulfilled life in Nigerian settings devoid of condemnation.

Educating the Child in School-like Environment

Teaching and learning in early years in the school like environment appears to be guided by the principles of pioneers of early childhood education. Such early childhood advocates include Locke who presented the child as a blank sheet, a tabula rasa, or an empty vessel waiting passively to be filled with a predetermined body of knowledge (Riley, 2003); Piaget, a behaviourist, believes that the child should be placed in positive position, and alerts educators to the child's active role in their learning, and the importance of mental activity; and more importantly, that whatever teaching method used must be determined by the age of the child (Whitebread, 2003). Vygotsky is of the view that children learn most effectively through social interaction. Others include Maria Montessori, who preaches against pretence-play but lays more emphasis on learning with real life materials specifically constructive materials, which help in sensory discrimination and in colour and shape matching; encourage self-initiated activity for young children; Froebel, who started the kindergarten – a German word which means “the child's garden”, whose philosophy is that play rightly fosters, unites the germinating life of the child with the adult playing a significant role in making such play meaningful (Smith, Cowie and Blades, 2003) among others.

All these appear to build upon common teaching and learning principles of early years development, care and education. These principles emphasize the holistic nature of children's learning and development (as distinct from learning separated out into subjects), the importance of developing autonomy, intrinsic motivation and self-discipline through the encouragement of child-initiated, self-directed activity, the value of firsthand experiences and the crucial role in children's development of other children and adults (Whitebread, 2006). According to Murphy (1996), their view appears to be influenced by the belief that a child's development towards scientific rationality emerges spontaneously as she explores and plays with the environment. Early childhood educationists are interested in what the child learns and how he learns it. To them, both contribute substantially. However, Katz (1992) cited in Riley (2003) argues that the inculcation of positive learning dispositions should be the priority in the minds of those working with children. To achieve this, those working with children should emphasize majorly on meeting the needs of the children with respect to need for love

and security, emotional security, love and self-worth, intellectual challenge, feeling in control, among others.

Educating the child in Nigerian Traditional Societies

Traditional or indigenous education in Nigeria societies can trace its origin to the beginning of human existence in these societies. This is true to the extent that every society either illiterate or literate, civilized or not has ways of formally and informally transmitting her cultures and values to her young generations. The informal nature of the education stems from the fact that there are no laid down rules or regulations to follow while educating the young ones. This type of training begins as early as two years or later depending on the child's level of development.

Children are taught the origins of the clan, village and town, tribe legend, geographical features of their environment (e.g. names of trees, hills, mountains, rivers, animals, birds, insects, among others) that are common in their locality during the evenings at the fire side by their parents, or in a group by a relative, during moonlight through stories. Riddles and proverbs are also taught and used to test children's understanding of the world around them.

The diversified cultures, tribes, religious inclinations, geographical locations and occupations, influence the aspirations of parents on what children should learn. Instructional materials used and the methods of educating the young ones may differ from one ethnic group to another. Hence, in the traditional Nigerian communities, children are exposed to trainings that are geared towards the transmission of the cultural heritage of the child's fore fathers starting from a very tender age. This was stressed by Castle (1966) when he discussed growing up in East Africa that African customary education aims at:

conserving the cultural heritage of the nuclear family, clan and tribe, to adapt children to their physical environment and teach them how to use it, to explain to them their own future and that of their community depended on the perpetuation and understanding of their tribal institutions, on laws, language and values they inherited from the past (p. 39).

Blair, Jones and Simpson (1968 cited in Illiya, 2000) also emphasized this by saying that 'each culture has a typical personality- a particular pattern of motives, goals, ideals and values, which are characteristic and distinctive of that culture' (p. 36). Hence, the culture in which a child grows up, the physical features that characterize the environment therefore prescribes for the child to a great extent, how the child will be trained, and which social, emotional, physical and intellectual developmental patterns he/she will be exposed to. For instance, if a child's environment is characterized by mountains, planes, rivers or tropical forest, these features become the determining factor in the nature of education the child would receive to enable the child survive the local dangers and also to reap the benefits of that environment. Furthermore, the skills with which a child's ancestors are known for (e.g. great hunters, fishermen, herdsman, potters, carvers,

drummers, soothsayers, native doctors, to mention but a few) also indicates that their young ones would be exposed to such skills to enable them to excel and also perpetuate the occupation with which their ancestors are known.

However, so many similarities tend to exist between the two cultures in terms of goals and objectives as well as the methods used. In the Nigerian traditional society, education, no matter at what level or the environment in which the individual is receiving the training, is characterized according to Fafunwa (1974) by its "functional and interwoven nature". Functional in the sense that it aims at inducting the growing child into the ways of life of his people, to enable him/her to function effectively in his given environment from an early age and also to prepare him for future survival as an adult. The interwoven nature indicates that education in the traditional Nigerian societies is not as compartmentalized as in the Western system of education. It combines physical training with character building (e.g. teaching a girl child how to sit properly with both legs stretched forward in order to form a good body posture and to avoid indecent exposure of the body), manual activity with intellectual training (e.g. the playing of 'Ayo' in Yoruba, 'ncho' in Hausa, okwe in Igbo' game during which time children are taught how to manipulate the objects used as teaching materials with their hands in order to outwit their opponent which requires some elements of intellectual training in number co-ordination) as well as physical training with emotional and social training (e.g. ability to accept defeats during wrestling, racing, acrobatic display, riddles, proverbs, among others). This signifies that Nigerian traditional education is geared towards aiding the all round development of the child. Also the teachers, and instructional materials used, are all drawn from the immediate environment.

Other similarities exist in the area of what the child is to be exposed to and why the child should receive such exposures. These are usually dictated by the needs of the particular environment in which the child is born. Education in traditional Nigerian societies according to (Fafunwa, 1974) is generally geared towards introducing young ones to the 'beliefs (e.g. religion and rituals,) and moral values systems of their people, their occupational techniques, social duties of their fore fathers, and a preparation for adulthood'. The children are therefore made to learn skills that will help them to cope successfully in their environment. In fact, parents expect their children to show evidence of these traits as early as four years old believing that a child who will be successful in life should show signs of having acquired some of the expected behaviours of his people.

For instance, Illiya (2000) carried out a study on child rearing practices in the Northern part of the country. Her study results revealed that children from the northern region of the country are trained to be more:

group oriented and interdependent in their relationship with others, passive among grown-ups but self assertive among peers, independent, self-efficient because of the competitive nature of work performance among peers, and aggressive because of the nomadic life the child would face latter in life as an adult (p.34).

Some code of behaviours that are instilled in the child as early as possible according to the results of the study includes:

not to talk when adults are talking, not to expect an explanation when being scolded, how to greet an adult first whenever the child meets an adult, how to receive thing from adults with two outstretched hand or at least with the right but not the left hand (p. 36).

However, in the eastern part of Nigeria, community life is propagated from the early years. The child is taught above all that he cannot live alone, that group living is much better and has more advantages than living a solitary life thus a popular saying in Igboland that 'it is more difficult to break broom sticks when held together than when single'. Children are also made to understand that the group, which made their life possible, expect them to conform to its services for defence of the land. Children are also taught how to chew their words before speaking especially when talking with or to an adult, respect for elders and family unity and to participate in common task in the community. According to Uka (1966) in the Eastern Nigerian communities, children are trained to be obedient, industrious, be their brother's keeper, conform to the laws of the land and how not to argue with adults even when their views could be right. Children are taught to respect the elders in the whole clan as well as village where they belong.

All these inductions into the ways of life of the people in the Nigerian traditional societies tend to arise from natural impulse, response to suggestions from others rather than from planning or curriculum oriented and the adults tend to use variety as well as similar methods while educating the young ones in these societies.

Instructional Techniques in Traditional Nigerian Societies

The education of the child in Nigerian traditional societies begins from infancy just like their counterparts in different parts of the world. However, in Nigeria traditional societies, certain members of the family take primary responsibility for educating the young ones more than others. Mothers for instance, because of the natural responsibility bestowed on them by nature from birth to about two years tend to be responsible for the child's upbringing. For instance, from birth she breast feeds the child whenever he or she is hungry, carries the infant on her back while going for a walk or carrying out household duties, sings lullaby to the child when he/she cries and sleeps with the child at night. This mother and child relationship continues until the child is weaned. During this period, mothers in all Nigerian traditional societies train their children in toileting, teach the child how to eat, socialise, greetings appropriate for each time of the day, how to keep his body clean and how to respect elders, all usually carried through play. Method of teaching is very practical and spontaneous; Imitation, repetition, observation, demonstration and explanations is often used. Children are made to practice whatever they are taught immediately under the watchful eyes of their mothers. However, by the time the child reaches the age of three, during which the child is able to move about the immediate environment, educating the child on the right behaviours expected of him/her becomes the responsibility of all adults living in the child's immediate environment (clan and the entire village).

This signifies that the responsibility of bringing up a child rests on the shoulders of all adults in the child's immediate environment. The adults would always participate in providing him with a wide range of stimulating interactions that positively nurture the child's development. As one writer (Ellis, 1978 cited in FGN/UNICEF, 2001) also remarked:

all children are in a sense everybody's children or at least a concern of a great number.... and there is much less stress upon the individual mother's role in the socialisation of the child. (P. 137)

The child's siblings, uncles and aunts, grandparents as well as neighbours help in educating the child on how to survive in his community. They cooperate in providing the child with a wide range of stimulations that will positively nurture the child's intellectual, emotional, physical and social developments. The teaching methods used are diversified and the things taught integrated. For instance, according to Fafunwa (1974), at this stage in development, children learn by doing, that is, children and adolescents are engaged in participatory education through ceremonies, rituals, imitations, recitation, and demonstration. They are involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting, hunting, black smiting. Children are allowed to engage in different kinds of plays to develop their latent physical ability and to explore their immediate environment.

Language as well as intellectual skills are taught through the use of songs, storytelling and retelling, proverbs, riddles and tongue-twisters usually during the moonlight nights after dinner. Children learn about nature through observation of the immediate environment with elders during which names of trees, birds, animals, plants and flowers are mentioned. The study of local history and legends of the ancestors, are taught through stories during moonlight tales. Recreational subjects included wrestling, dancing, drumming, acrobatic display and racing.

Children also learn through repetition of the new words mentioned by the teacher. These teachings are usually performed by relations who are good at storytelling and children would always gather in the relations compound every night when the moon light is up to listen and learn from them. Language development of Nigerian children is also motivated by the presence of many children around the growing child. Nigerian children start to receive training on language of their immediate environment as soon as they begin to talk but this tends to be intensified at the age of two. The nature of family settings in term of family make ups (the extended family system) and ways in which neighbours live very closely together with one another make it possible for the growing child to have more than enough adults around him/her to talk with and learn from. All these adults tend to provide the child with social stimulation, which exposes the child to the language of the immediate environment.

Physical development is encouraged by sending the young ones on errands, encouraging them to wrestle and race with peers, climb dwarf walls and trees, imitate some dancing steps from adults. Children's social and emotional well being are

developed by encouraging them to visit friends and relations in the absence of the parents, share things (toys, snacks) with age mates, play with other children away from home from as soon as the child begins to walk and talk to a reasonable extent. Various games are also provided to encourage intellectual development. As noted by Uka, (1966):

learning and application of number concepts are introduced to Nigerian children through native games called 'Ekak' in Ibibio, 'Ayo' in the West, 'Okwe' in the East and 'Dara' in the North. This game is common in Nigerian communities (both urban and rural) but is mostly played in the rural areas. It is a game of wit, engenders a sense of obedience to established procedures and encourages the spirit of give-and-take (p. 63).

Children are also trained in numerical skills through the use of local materials like dry seeds, stones, sticks, cowries, money, their personal belongings as well as other objects.

Play activities are carried out on individual basis when children are still very young (e.g. as soon as the child begins to crawl and move about within the home). At this stage they are provided with gender sensitive toys to play with. During this time, they play with imaginary peers, soliloquising with themselves. But as the child grows older and is able to walk about in his/her neighbourhood, the child is encouraged to visit and play with other children. A child who finds it difficult to accommodate peers during social visits is usually cautioned or ridiculed by the adults around. Group plays are also encouraged. During play, children tend to perform some adult activities like cooking, grinding corn like their mothers, acting mum and dad, native doctors, market women, hunters, town criers, among others. Gender roles are also reflected during the children's play activities. One interesting thing about the use of play as a teaching method in the Nigerian traditional societies is the fact that adults are very often available to supervise their play and in this way direct and correct some misconceptions children may have about certain roles played by adults thus internalizing the right roles from a very young age.

Child Interaction with Adults in Nigerian Traditional Societies

In most developed countries of the world, children are encouraged to ask their parents questions on any issue that interest them. This practice according to Siann and Ugwuegbu (1988), help the child to "assimilate new experiences and absorb them into his/her ever-expanding cognitive network" (p.14). However, in Nigerian traditional environments, the situation appears to be different. This was revealed by the findings of some educational researchers. For instance, Vernon (1969 cited in Siann and Ugwuegbu, 1988) observed that children in many traditional Nigerian societies are discouraged from asking adults too many questions and are encouraged to experiment actively in activities that are not regarded as exclusive for adults. This was also corroborated by Hake, 1972 (cited in Siann and Ugwuegbu 1988) in his summary of child-rearing practices in northern Nigeria thus in the northern Nigerian family, restrictions are also placed upon children's conversations with their parents. These restrictions suggest the attitude of northern Nigerian parents toward the correct method of raising children.

In the traditional family, children are taught to respect and sometimes fear adults, especially those in authority. Learning respect for elders must take place primarily in the home. So the development of humility is an important developmental task for the northern Nigerian child. Because of this wide spread belief, it is only natural that Nigerian parents feel that "children should be seen but not heard. Also Uka's study of (1966) titled "Growing up in Nigerian Culture" which serves as a pioneer study (and the only national study to date) of physical and behavioural growth and development of Nigerian children revealed that with regard to sibling/parent interaction with children in Nigerian culture, a few parents showed sympathetic and encouraging attitudes towards children's curiosity but most families evade discussing certain issues (e.g. sex related issues) with young children. According to the responses given by the respondent who were all parents, they usually told the children that such questions are forbidden. One famous example used by Uka was that which has to do with conception and the impending arrival of a baby. Uka's study revealed that answers to this type of questions were given without detailed explanations. For instance, children were given such answers as "babies come from God", "babies come from the hospital or maternity centre", or that "father brings the new baby".

In the eastern part of Nigeria, this writer describes childhood education practices with respect to encouraging curiosity by adults. In eastern Nigeria, children from a very traditional home grow up in an atmosphere where children should be seen and not heard for the adults know best. The adults authority is accepted to be always right, has to be right, can never be wrong.

Implications of this practice

Nigerian history has evolved. First was the period of no infiltration (traditional government, and everything was localised). The second was the period of gross external intrusion from western Europe while the third is the period of independence. As a result, our indigenous culture encounters a lot of influence from outside of Nigerian borders. Exposing Nigerian child to foreign language(s) early could help them relate favourably with people other culture; survive in business ventures and other exchanges (technology). Most importantly, Nigerians also have the opportunities of travelling outside their shores, thus needing prior knowledge of foreign culture for survival.

The views and observations from researchers in Nigeria traditional societies reveal that education in Nigerian traditional societies has its advantages and disadvantages alike. Communication wise, children are to be 'seen and heard' (Uka, 1966: 60) and are also viewed as humans who are not capable of doing much on their own without the help of adults. However, the goals of the education in the traditional society if properly inculcated would help the growing child live a fulfilled life. In the area of independence, children are made to perform most activities under the watchful eyes of an adult. They are expected to be solely dependent on the adult world. This to a reasonable extent runs contrary to what western education aims at inculcating in the children who passed through it at this age level.

The implication of this type of teaching-learning process in the traditional Nigerian society is that, it provides the type of education that would enable its children to be self-reliant which would aid their effective and meaningful contribution to the society which they would live in. This is because it is geared towards preparation of children for adult life, tends to help the child to realise himself, relate to others in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and promotes self-reliance and economic efficiency. Children are taught to learn by doing. This could be seen from what is the practice in different regions in Nigeria. At home and in the farm children are taught the skills of the society in which they live and the behaviours expected of its members. Through this means, the values of each society are transmitted. Indeed, it may have made education more directly relevant to the society in which the child is growing up. Thus, traditional education in Nigerian societies tends to reinforce the social ethics existing in each particular tribe, and prepares children born into such society to live and serve the society effectively with the acquired skills, attitudes and values.

However, this type of training has its own disadvantage. For instance, training children not to air their views but to be good listeners might not augur well with development of self-esteem in Nigerian children. Nigerian children might grow into adults who might not summon courage to discuss issues concerning the well being of the society. They might grow up into good followers and not good decision takers. This is because they have not learned to take pride in taking decisions or discussing freely with adults without inhibitions. Nevertheless, this might be one of the reasons why this was included as one of the objectives of establishing this level of education in Nigeria.

Nigerian pre-school children should not be seen as either just another future generation or merely a representative of Nigerian culture. They are children aided by adults to live their lives and trying to make sense out of it with a variety of tools drawn from a variety of cultural influences (western education culture, Nigerian traditional cultures, church cultures and even their parents professional cultures, among others). Thus, everything the Nigerian child does may be shaped by a complex interaction of different cultural perspectives drawn from all the significant others that play any role in the children's all round development. If people are governed by the culture which they belong, since they have to develop such culture norms in order to interact effectively with others around them, the Nigerian children are thus equipped with experiences that can help them survive in these two distinct cultures (western and traditional Nigerian cultures).

The Nigerian pre-school child from the tender age, exhibits behaviours which depict complexity of cultural identity. This situation therefore demands that they reconcile various ways of being in the world in which they find themselves (by accident and by design) from their ethnicity, religion school, and home environments. All the behaviours they exhibit consciously or unconsciously to interact favourably with each of the environments were largely inculcated by influences of the significant others. However, they learn from many people and from different cultural backgrounds, thus considering their age level may unconsciously modify their behaviours in real life situation that it becomes so natural in any of these environments. In this respect, their situation becomes natural tilting towards inborn, innate and thus acceptable by people

they interact with. Hence the cultural tendencies the Nigerian pre-school child exhibits is likely to be prompted by the situation the child finds himself/herself or as the need arises. The child therefore adapts to circumstances-perhaps quite unconscious in the case of a child who stays in more or less the society all her life or much more self-conscious in the case of a child who finds himself in an environment where mixed cultural tendencies exists (Urban Areas).

For instance, Hofstede, (1997) is happy with a society that includes a variety of cultural options, but condemns 'pluralistic monoculturalism' in which several cultures may co-exist, but each individual is doomed to remain in the culture into which he or she was born. Exposing them to these cultures could help in bridging the gap between children from at risk background city; farm, village and that of privileged ones etc. However, one should not also lose sight of the fact that individual differences (personality traits can play a great role in shaping people.

Due to the spontaneity of training of the child, there is a tendency for the Nigerian child to take risks and risk taking fuels creativity. This fostering of potential creativity imbedded in the traditional Nigerian education would lead to positive development of the child and the nation at large. There is global emphasis on fostering of creativity. Western nations have taken this more seriously than developing nations. As stated earlier, western educational culture is deliberate and purposeful while the Nigerian traditional child is trained in a spontaneous manner which potentially leads to creativity. The Nigerian early childhood educational system could thus deliberately make this spontaneous training a deliberate part of the curriculum of early childhood education in form of curriculum input as obtained in western cultural educational setting. Just as Western cultural educational goals are definite, Nigerian cultural educational goals will consequently possess the fostering of creativity among children as a determined outcome. By this, creativity will become an integral outcome that will be sought by stakeholders in the Nigerian trado-cultural educational setting.

Conclusion

The goal in cross-cultural training is to give one a powerful set of skills, a framework to make sense of whatever one does and experience so that one will be able to interact successfully and survive in whatever environment one finds oneself. Such training if started early, could lead to such behaviours (values and beliefs) being automatically internalized. Nigerian pre-school children are not either just another future generation or less like any other, nor are they merely a representative of Nigerian culture. They are children living their lives and trying to make sense out of it with a variety of tools drawn from a variety of cultural influences (western education culture, Nigerian traditional cultures, church cultures and even parents' professional cultures, among others). Thus, everything the Nigerian child does may be shaped by a complex interaction of different cultural perspectives drawn from all significant others that play any role in the children's all round development.

At an early stage in life, Nigerian children are exposed to how people from different cultural backgrounds express their personality through their culture with respect to

language, music, poems, rhymes, life ways, view of the world, its comprehension of the time and the good, or right and wrong through different subject areas the child is exposed to in the school. This makes it applicable for Nigerian child to understand his culture as well as that of others in others in the contemporary world that has turned into a village. If people are governed by the culture which they belong, since they have to develop such cultural norms in order to interact effectively with others around them, then Nigerian children are thus equipped with experiences that could help them survive in these two distinct cultures (western and traditional Nigerian cultures). Thus, the writer of this paper is of the opinion that exposing Nigerian child to these two Cultural backgrounds could enhance the Nigerian child's ability to adapt to the modern world dominated by western technological, social culture as well as fit in properly in our own indigenous traditional cultural heritage.

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