

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

(With particular reference to the Bantu of South Africa.)

A. GENERAL.

1. What is the place of Culture in Education?

Education has been defined at some times as the passing on of race gains. Such and kindred definitions indicate the very close connection between education and the culture of a people.

As a matter of fact, this definition summed up the whole of education in primitive societies. The ideal man in tribal society was a man who behaved according to the traditional behaviour patterns of the tribe, observed all the sanctions and carried out all the customs with the formalities proper to such occasions.

Primitive society placed a premium on imitation and discouraged initiative and inventiveness. Culture was regarded as static. Ideals and norms were regarded as having been set in the past, and all the ~~be~~ new generation had to do, was merely to go along the safe and beaten paths and all would be well. The fallacy in this view of education lay in the fact that culture is never static. The rate of change may be so slow that it is almost imperceptible, but it is none the less present all the time - a change for the better or a change for the worse. In gearing down education to slavish imitation of the past progress is retarded and the one good custom is allowed to "Corrupt the world." A study of world history shows that it is those races and peoples who have most easily cast aside the shackles of their dead past and encouraged initiative and intelligent curiosity, who have led in the development of what is called modern civilization. And yet this view of education, with slight variations, has persisted, in some quarters, up to the present day.

11. Modern education, however, does not give so dominant and hallowed a place to the cultural past, merely for its own sake. We realise that for progress, culture must change and adapt itself to changing conditions; and one of the most effective agencies for preparing society for these changes is education. As a society becomes more complex and diversified, the more rapid becomes its tempo of cultural change. And education, if it is to fulfil its real function, has to take cognisance of these rapid changes - many of which cannot be predicted - and plan a new approach to its task of preparing the young to live a fuller and more abundant life, not only in the future but in the present. This is the problem of the modern educator: how to prepare the individual for future action by a just interpretation of present experience in the light of past experience. In other ~~words~~ words, the educator firmly grounded in the present must nevertheless "look before and after".

This is true for all education. The problem, however, becomes even more crucial and difficult in a situation where a new, dominant and superior culture impinges upon a less developed culture as in South Africa. Adjustments and adaptations are necessary. How much of the old shall be encouraged and how much of the new? What are to be the standards, the norms, the values? Shall the school lead the social order and prepare for changes (d.e. become revolutionary) or shall it lag behind and consolidate the gains as the society hurries forward to new fields?

In such a situation, if a sound system of education is to be developed, the position must be considered in terms of human values - universal values which transcend race or colour, or material interests.

B. In particular Culture in Bantu education.

1. Standards of Cultural Assessment.

We in South Africa are in such a situation as is described above. But we cannot solve our problem by considering Bantu education as something different from all other education. Education is one in its essential aspects. Naturally, in its more detailed application these aspects will have to be interpreted in terms of local needs and the stage of development reached by the nation. So it is well for us to

consider education in its more universal aspects, before we discuss the place of Bantu culture in a system of education for the Bantu.

First of all let us consider if it is possible to formulate standards of cultural assessment which would be universally applicable. Starting from educational fundamentals we shall find that the educator is chiefly concerned with individual ~~person~~ personality- not with a group or group's mode of life. But we cannot consider individual personality except in relation to other personalities- for life cannot be lived in a vacuum. Thus the group and its mode of living in a secondary manner are also important for the educator, as the individual cannot be considered without reference to his group. It is possible then to assess the value of a group's mode of life and traditions- i.e. its culture (a) with reference to its effectiveness in securing survival, continuity and growth of the group (b) with reference (i) to its influence on the individuals of the group (ii) to its relation with other groups (iii) to the contribution which it makes or is capable of making to the progress of the world.

These standards having been worked out from universal assumptions apply to all cultures and thus give us an excellent foot-rule for the evaluation of our own Bantu culture. For we realise that much in Bantu ways and life is good in itself-but that it is undergoing a change. We believe that education should conserve the best of Bantu culture and at the same time give acquaintance with the great intellectual tools and the social concepts and institutions of the West so that they may learn to meet on equal terms with other peoples the conditions of the modern world.

11. Unity in diversity as cultural goal of Bantu Education.

It is for this reason that we would plead for a more scientific approach to the problems of Bantu education and less sentimentality, in particular, on questions of culture. We would insist that only those aspects of Bantu culture which pass the rigorous test set by the universal standards enunciated above should be incorporated into the Bantu educational system. Appreciation of a people's culture should be aroused not because it is different from all other cultures, but because (a) it is needed by the group as a means of survival and growth, (b) it permits the development of individual qualities desirable in man viewed as a human being and not as a member of a group, and (c) It is capable of distinctive contribution to the pattern of human life.

✓ We also maintain that the survival or surrender of a culture depends on the decision of the group, trained by the educator to evaluate and criticize that culture in response to external stimuli. From this it follows that there ought to be no opposition from outside to a group's desire to merge its mode of life in that of a larger group for economic, political or social reasons. History suggests that such unification does not necessarily involve suppression of distinctive cultures within the unified whole.

As educators we view humanity as one. To us what is common, actually or potentially, to members of various groups and races is more important than what differentiates them. This ultimate unity for which we strive does not mean uniformity. There is scope for infinite variety in the application of universal standards to modes of life, and self expression is not affected by such standards.

From the foregoing it is obvious that if this goal is to be achieved, (1) the direction of the Bantu educational system must fall more and more largely into the hands of the Bantu themselves, whilst ~~the~~ the role of the Europeans becomes increasingly that of suggestion rather than dominance; (2) trained and enlightened public opinions must be developed in the Bantu. These suggestions would entail the provision of higher education on liberal lines, side by side with mass education, and also the acceptance by the country of a point of view which would not allow Bantu ~~cultural~~ cultural development to wait on economic development.

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