UNIVERSITY OF LONDON INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

STUDIES IN EDUCATION

2. EDUCATION AND CULTURAL TRADITION

by

Margaret Read, C.B.E., Ph.D., M.A.

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2. Education and Cultural Tradition

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EDUCATION AND CULTURAL TRADITION

As an opening to this lecture I should like to pay tribute to some of the people who have taught me how to do my share of the work which now falls within the scope of the Colonial Department of the Institute of Education. It is to Mr. James Fairgrieve, geographer and great teacher, that this Department owes its origin. It was he who realised in the late 1920's that men and women going to pioneer educational work in undeveloped and backward areas needed certain distinctive qualities, and a different outlook from those who followed the well worn tracks in Britain. He insisted on them developing their initiative and powers of observation, and he trained them in his own unique way to form judgments and to have confidence in these judgments. Under one of his former pupils the Sudan developed its well known Institute of Education at Bakht er Ruda. Under another the Gold Coast University College has just opened its Institute of Education.

To two well known figures in Colonial Office circles I owe my introduction to the systematic study of education in the dependent territories of the Commonwealth. The late Mr. Arthur Mayhew brought to this study his experience in

India, which he analysed in two books whose high scholastic value have perhaps never been fully acknowledged. His Education of India published in 1926 and his Christianity and the Government of India published in 1929, form a contribution to the study of the inter-action of two great cultures which some of us return to again and again for their learning and their balance and their judgment. Those same three terms characterise the writings and the counsel of Sir Herbert Scott. His Directorship of Education first in the Transvaal and then in Kenya, together with his long association with the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies. have enabled him to recognise and to analyse the chief educational problems in multi-racial areas and he has done this with a clarity and objectiveness which are the hall-mark of scholarship.

I came back from India in 1925 with an insistent problem which I wanted to study—the problem of the Indian peasant turned factory hand—the nature of the cultural change affecting families and individuals who for generations had lived in villages and practised agriculture and were now part of an urban industrial proletariat. I went with this problem knocking at the doors of sociologists and psychologists. It was a vain quest, no one was interested. Then I met Professor Malinowski. He was just beginning to develop his studies in culture contact, somewhat reluctantly at first, for it was then an unorthodox approach for a social anthropologist, but later, as

is well known, with growing enthusiasm. To him I owe this open door, the extremely rigorous discipline of an intensive study of social anthropology, and the encouragement to apply this knowledge when acquired to the practical problems of migrant labour, nutrition and education. To those who worked closely with him, Professor Malinowski was a most stimulating teacher. He demanded unremitting work, he was a vigorous critic, but he was always generous of his time, his interest and his advice.

The title of this lecture demands some indication of the field of studies included under it. For the purposes of to-day's lecture the field will be narrowed to the problems as they occur in the dependent or non-autonomous territories of the This includes colonies, pro-Commonwealth. tectorates, trusteeship territories, territories under a condominium and territories since the last war administered under a British military administration, such as Cyrenaica, but now under a temporary form of civil administration. The common political element in all these diverse areas is some form of political tie with the United Kingdom, and following from that political relationship, cultural contact with English life and thought which is expressed, among other manifestations, in various forms of educational institutions. The type of problems under review however is found in many other countries, in those which have some political ties with the Dominions; in those having political links with other European or American

powers; and in those which are independent politically but which have historical and cultural links with one or more of the European or Ameri-

can or Oriental powers.

We shall not be discussing here to-day the problems centering round the acquisition of The three R's, as the basic tools for literacy. general schooling, using that term for the moment to distinguish it from the wider connotation of education, are common the world over. acquire these basic skills of reading, writing and number, children are assembled in a class-room and taught by a teacher. This form of education is well nigh universal, and the educationist from whatever country he comes recognises the universal character of such instruction and feels at home in such a class-room whether it is in Mexico or Siam or Tanganyika or North Borneo. Though these common tools are a constant in all instruction, the language in which they are taught; the reading material provided; the script in which writing is learned; the illustrative content of the arithmetic-all these are of infinite variety. They lie within the field of cultural tradition, whether they are related to the culture of the local people or whether these basic skills are the medium for the introduction of another, an outside, cultural tradition.

We are concerned here with education in a much wider sense than the acquiring of basic skills. The field of education and cultural tradition covers the social relations of individuals with one another, whether in a family, a neighbourhood, or a group held together by occupation or common interest. It covers the concept of citizenship with its implication of allegiance to some form of a 'state' or political entity. It covers the accumulated knowledge of a people, about their past, their physical environment and the uses to which it can be put, about the mutual relations of human beings inside and outside the law. It covers their religious beliefs and practices, their ethical codes, their system of values, and their philosophic outlook or weltanschaung. These are vital elements in the cultural tradition of all peoples, whatever their political status may be, or their stage of economic development, whether these elements are enshrined in a literature, or whether in an unwritten form they are preserved in the minds and memories and hearts of a people. These are the roots by which a people lives.

Our terms of reference—the peoples and areas of non-autonomous territories within the Commonwealth—focus our attention upon the dual aspect of education and cultural tradition. We are concerned with an inter-cultural situation, where the local cultural tradition of the people is in close relationship with that of the metropolitan power. Those European governments which have deliberately adopted a policy of assimilation in their dependent territories have carried out this policy systematically in their educational planning, introducing a European language and through it the accepted content of education as

given in the metropolitan country. By so doing they have intensified the impact of their European culture on the local people and their indigenous cultural tradition. They have not however eliminated the inter-cultural relationship between themselves and the dependent peoples. They have produced a class of évolués who are completely at home in the alien cultural tradition but who are at the same time déracinés, detached almost entirely from their own cultural background, and from the

masses of their own people.

The British policy has been against assimilation both in the political and in the cultural sense. Not having the rational logical outlook of some of other European powers, we have laid up for ourselves a store of trouble in the educational field. We have radically altered the economies of the colonial peoples; we have introduced new religious faiths, new sets of values, new concepts of citizenship. We have taken with us wherever we went, and indeed we could not have done otherwise, our own cultural tradition, including our language and literature and social and political institutions. At the same time we have deliberately fostered, in certain areas, some elements in the local traditional culture, notably the languages, and where the people are Muslims, the Islamic faith and pattern of living.

The problems which have accumulated as the result of this cultural policy of the United Kingdom are formidable. It is more than time that we in this country and the leaders of the

peoples in the dependent territories together examined the situation, and tried to analyse it in terms of the future education of their children. In order to get some sense of perspective into this admittedly confused situation we will take a brief historical look at the last quarter of a century.

Twenty-five years ago the Colonial Office put out a White Paper on 'Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa'. This directive followed the setting up of the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, and was in part at least stimulated by the Report of the Phelps Stokes Commission which visited all parts of British Africa, as well as the Union of South Africa, in 1920 and 1921. The White Paper stated at the outset 'there is a widely held opinion that the results of education in Africa have not been altogether satisfactory'. I gather from their election manifesto that the Conservative Party still hold the same view.

Under the heading Adaptation to Native Life

the following principles were laid down:

'Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution. Its aim should be to render the individual more efficient in his or her condition of life, whatever it may be, and to promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement of agriculture, the development of native industries, the improvement of health, the training of people in the management of their own affairs, and the inculcation of true ideals of citizenship and service'....'The first task of education is to raise the standard alike of character and efficiency of the bulk of the people.' To illustrate this last sentence, I cannot resist stealing one of the Chairmen's best stories of the Nigerian shoemaker whose shop sign read: 'Good work done here. Trained in Enugu prison.'

The authors of the memorandum endeavoured to focus attention on what they considered the chief task:

'The central difficulty in the problem lies in finding ways to improve what is sound in indigenous tradition. Education should strengthen the feeling of responsibility to the tribal community, and at the same time should strengthen will power; should make the conscience sensitive both to moral and intellectual truth; and should impart some power of discriminating between good and evil, between reality and superstition. Since contact with civilisation, and even education itself, must necessarily tend to weaken tribal authority and the sanctions of existing beliefs, and in view of the all-prevailing belief in the supernatural which affects the whole life of the African, it is

essential that what is good in the old beliefs and sanctions should be strengthened and what is defective should be replaced.'

These principles have as it were remained on the statute book. Remarkably few teachers in Africa, whether European or African, have ever heard of them. A few, a very few, individuals have been inspired to try out these principles in a new kind of school based on tribal tradition, but such efforts have been unrewarding in more senses than one, and most of these experiments have proved to be a blind alley, offering no advancement for the pupils or still less for the teacher. A quarter of a century after these principles were laid down, it was still possible for the editorial in Overseas Education of January 1950 to answer the question: 'What are the best elements in African culture?' as though all that was needed was an ethical and intellectual sieve applied to the elements of African cultural tradition. It is impossible to escape from the conclusion that the authors of the 1925 memorandum believed also that some kind of sifting process could take place, and that by some means, which was not specified, all that was 'best' would come through the sieve and be used in the schools, and that what was 'defective' and did not get through could be conveniently and quietly thrown away.

No one who has studied the problem of education among pre-literate peoples and in undeveloped areas will quarrel with the general tenor of the principles laid down in the 1925 White Paper. It is perhaps inherent in White Papers that they stick to general principles and leave it to the wit of man to discover how to apply them. Judgments in retrospect are always fatally easy. It does seem clear to-day, however, that first of all some means should have been found by which every active educationist, whether in government or mission service, had a copy of the memorandum and was advised by the responsible authorities to discuss it with his teachers in schools and his students in training. Secondly, the memorandum might have given a definite impetus to the study of indigenous methods of education in the African territories themselves. It did in fact give rise to several articles in journals, and if these articles had been followed by systematic studies we should have been in a very different position to-day, twentyfive years later.

We need to remind ourselves constantly that we are concerned with an inter-cultural situation. No emphasis on methods of indigenous education and the content of local cultural tradition would in itself, that is carried out in isolation, have thrown much light on the existing problems, or met the educational needs of the dependent territories at any time during the last quarter of a century. Parallel with the studies of local cultural tradition should have gone some examination and assessment of the English cultural tradition which we never ceased to export in varying forms to the

dependent territories.

Let us admit, but not linger over, some of the reasons why the 1925 memorandum fell on stony ground in the African territories, and why in the other dependent territories of the Commonwealth no parallel statement of policy was ever made. Following a few years of vigorous planning in Africa in the late 1920's, the economic blitz of the early 1930's caused drastic pruning of educational staff and plans. Then the uncertainty and paralysis of the pre-war years were followed by the war itself. These factors had a profound influence on financial policies and on the supply of education officers and teachers from the United They did not prevent however an Kingdom. increasing demand for schools of all types, a popular demand which exercised constant pressure on the authorities to expand the education system both horizontally and vertically. Questions of organisation, administration and finance were dominant, and there was neither time nor inclination to examine the content and directives of education. Periodically, and with increasing emphasis, dissatisfaction was expressed, inside and outside educational circles, with the end products of the schools. A look at school curricula in some of the African territories during this last quarter of a century gives an impression of subjects being added to or subtracted from the curriculum, with, at one end of the educational system, a reiterated emphasis on something called 'a rural bias'; and at the other end increasing preoccupation with external examinations.

The only element in the curricula of the primary schools which was consistently developed was the use of the vernacular languages in most of Africa and in parts of South East Asia. Even this development had a certain boomerang effect in some territories. The emphasis on the vernacular as a medium of instruction led to the exclusion of English except at the higher levels, with the result that the general development of education was retarded. This is only one illustration of the failure to appreciate the implications of the intercultural situation which we ourselves had introduced. The present day clamour to learn English throughout the dependent territories, perhaps with greatest emphasis in those communities and areas where English instruction was virtually excluded, should remind us that our good intentions, of building an educational system on local foundations, are not enough at the present time. We must accept and meet the full challenge of this inter-cultural situation. It is of far more than local import in the world of to-day.

There is one aspect of this educational situation where two cultural traditions are in juxtaposition, in which study and research is urgently needed. Sir Fred Clarke, in his Education and Social Change published in 1940, urged us in this country to examine the present types of educational institutions in England, and to analyse the extent to which they express certain characteristics of the English way of thinking. This is not the kind of intellectual exercise which appeals to most

Englishmen. The late Professor Karl Mannheim, who had that rare gift of seeing us from outside as well as being one of us, suggested in his Diagnosis of our Time the fundamental reason why we shrink from this kind of self-evaluation:

'The Englishman lives more in his institutions than in reflective thought. Parliamentary institutions, local government, voluntary associations are well established forms of activity in which a definite kind of spirit is embodied. If one sticks to the procedures as they are prescribed in institutions, the spirit is present without making it imperative that those who act should always be conscious of the meaning of these procedures. . . Yet when it comes to sudden changes which call for complete readjustment or when it is important that the world should understand the meaning of these changes, these bigger issues can only be achieved in the medium of ideas.'

Professor Mannheim wrote this in the ideological ferment of the pre-war and early war years. To-day we are in the throes of no lesser, and perhaps a much greater, ideological struggle. The liberal democratic way of life, which Professor Mannheim believed in so passionately, is being challenged in all parts of the dependent territories of the Commonwealth. The time has come to open our eyes and examine this almost blind faith in our institutions, and see to what extent these

institutions are the best and most effective means of conveying and maintaining the ideas in which we believe. We are faced by the immediate difficulty that in the educational field, we have not made this analysis of our institutions at home and therefore we have no body of knowledge to apply to the problems as they exist overseas. We can perhaps assess English schools as places where certain kinds of instruction take place; as places where children are assembled on an agegrade principle; as places where class feeling is reinforced or (less often) broken down. But the sociological study of schools and other centres of education, in particular communities, and the ways in which they contribute to the life of a community or draw their stimulation from itthat is virtually a virgin field in this country. It has fallen to a distinguished scholar from one of the Dominions to initiate a sociological study of a conventional grammar school in a dock workers' area. Yet that is the kind of study which will throw light on the problems of an expanding education system in the dependent territories. This type of study of educational institutions should draw on the techniques of social anthropology, as well as on those of sociology as it is usually understood in this country. It should in other words assess the nature and function of any given educational institution in terms of the social and cultural tradition of the local community, using that meaning of cultural tradition which was given to it at the beginning of this lecture. This involves essentially an examination of the relationship of the individuals inside the school, that is the pupils and teachers, with the individuals and social groups in the community in which it is

placed.

To illustrate this point let us go back for a moment to the 1925 memorandum. There it was laid down that one of the most effective means of training character was the residential school. In March this year the same statement was made in even stronger terms in an educational report from one of the East African territories. Now, no one questions the value and the special advantages of boarding schools. Part of the English tradition is a faith in that particular kind of institution—an almost unexamined faith, as Sir Fred Clarke and Professor Mannheim have suggested. Yet it is admitted in this country, and certainly in the dependent territories, that boarding schools can only be for the few. How about the many? How is their character training going to be divided between the school where they spend a few hours, and the home and the neighbourhood where they spend the rest of the day and night? Jacques Maritain with his French realism has reminded us in Education at the Cross Roads that some tension between home and school is inevitable. We can admit that, and yet not abandon the attempt to help the child, as well as his teacher, to relate the knowledge and attitudes and training which he receives inside and outside school. Without some attempt to study educational

Origins of Education among Primitive Peoples. In the United States Margaret Mead published her well known Coming of Age in Samoa in 1928, and followed this study of adolescence in Samoa by her study of childhood in Manus, published in 1930 as Growing up in New Guinea. In South Africa Mrs. Hoernlé focussed her wide knowledge of anthropological problems in an article in Africa 1931 'An outline of the Native Conception in Education'. In the volume The Bantu Speaking Tribes of South Africa published in 1937, Eileen Krige contributed an article on 'Individual Development' in which she emphasised the part played by magic and the ancestor cult in the training of Bantu children.

Dr. Audrey Richards broke new ground in her study of nutrition and the forming of habits and attitudes towards food and health among Bantu children in her Hunger and Work in a Savage Tribe in 1932, and further developed this approach in her Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia in 1937. Sir Herbert Scott in Africa in 1937 drew together for the first time recent studies in nutrition, such as those of Dr. Richards, with modern educational problems, in an article 'Education and Nutrition in the

Colonies.'

From the mid 1930's onward in several areas in the African continent, studies were initiated on the indigenous aspects of education. Among them one of the contributions most stimulating to educational thought was that by Dr. Meyer Fortes on 'Social and Psychological Aspects of Education in Taleland'. In this study, published in 1938, of the process of bringing up children in a tribe in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, Dr. Fortes has drawn a most challenging correlation between the integrated and homogeneous nature of Tallensi society, and the desire of Tallensi children to reach adult status as quickly as possible—a correlation which has been pointed out more recently in studies in China and Japan by Chinese and American anthropologists.

Dr. Édwin Smith, the veteran anthropologist and missionary, gathered together the studies made in Africa up to 1934 in 'Indigenous Education in Africa' published in the Essays Presented to Professor Seligman. It was however Professor Malinowski's article in the *International Review of Missions* in 1936 on 'Native Education and Culture Contact' which for the first time reviewed the anthropological studies in indigenous education and related them to the general study of inter-cultural contacts, and especially to the effects of modern schooling on African ideas of children's up-bringing.

Dr. Otto Raum, a former student of the Institute of Education, was in 1940 awarded his doctorate for his book Chaga Childhood, in which the first chapter contains an admirable review of the literature up to date. A more recent publication of the same type has been Mr. Gladwyn Child's Umbundu Kinship and Character. Both these studies, one of a leading Tanganyika tribe, the

other of a leading tribe in Angola, relate the experience of missionary educationists, one working under British, the other under Portuguese authorities, with anthropological studies and other academic disciplines. They indicate, I think, one of the main lines which future studies must take.

The studies made in Africa have been assisted greatly by the policy of the International African Institute to promote and publish studies in aspects of inter-cultural contact between European governments and missions on the one hand and African tribal peoples on the other. In the United States similar studies in the Pacific area and among the Indian tribes of North America produced a much more extensive literature, linked closely with Personality and Culture studies on the one hand, and on the other with comprehensive tribal studies in acculturation such as that among the Navajo Indians undertaken by Professor Clyde Kluckhohn and Dr. and Mrs. Leighton. The parallel development of studies of modern communities not living on a tribal basis, such as those by Davis and Dollard in the Southern States, and by Lloyd Warner and his colleagues in the Middle West, open up the problem of the relationship between home training and environment and the influence of the school and its curriculum. Under the auspices of the American Council of Youth a series of studies were made of Negro boys and girls in rural and urban communities, which read in conjunction with Franklin Frazier's Negro Family in the U.S.A. offer many suggestive lines for future

research. The more recent American studies show the importance of co-operation between different disciplines, notably those of social anthropology, rural sociology, psychology and education. This co-operation was stimulated by the policy of the Carnegie Corporation in granting fellowships at a high level to social anthropologists, psychologists and sociologists to study intensively, without other commitments, the techniques and approach of another one of these fields than their own.

This seems the place to refer to certain obvious gaps in the material available in this field. The Near and Middle East, India and Pakistan, South East Asia, the Caribbean, and to a lesser extent China, can show practically no contributions to these studies. This is probably partly due to the fact that very little research in cultural anthropology has been carried out in those areas until recently, and the sociological studies made have been of a survey type and not an analysis of the social structure and cultural tradition of the people.

There is an extension of this field of study which is practically untouched. It is the range of problems indicated by the 1925 Memorandum on Educational Policy in Africa and the relating of local cultural tradition to the teaching and life in schools and other educational institutions. Mr. Mayhew in his Education in India makes some penetrating comments on the effects of modern western schooling in India, and the failure to integrate the cultural tradition of Hindu life and thought with

a western form of school and college education. Such a study of the inter-relationship of two cultural traditions in a school and college setting pre-supposes existing studies of the local culture, and in particular of its aims and methods in bringing up children. It also pre-supposes an objective assessment of the English contribution to local

educational thought and practice.

One further aspect of these studies must be mentioned here, to which very little research has been directed. The first agents to establish schools and training colleges in most of the British dependent territories were the Christian churches through their missionary societies. The schools under these auspices, besides imparting the common skills of the three R's, taught a new faith, which brought with it new ethical ideas having a profound influence on family life and other social relationships. The effect of some of the earlier mission teaching, though this was not universally the case, was to make the converts despise their past and their own cultural tradition. When the influence of social anthropology had mitigated this earlier attitude, and both missions and government wanted to build on the people's traditions, much had been destroyed, and deep psychological conflicts occurred among the indigenous people from the well meant efforts by the English educationists to reinstate what had formerly been rejected by their predecessors.

Our task now is to indicate briefly the main lines of research which can throw light on the

problems of education in dependent territories, as we have been considering them in their intercultural relations. The first need is for adequate histories of education in each territory, to give us an objective factual description of what has taken place since the earliest European contacts. These histories should not be concerned only with administrative changes and statistics of develop-They should examine the ideological intentions of those responsible for promoting education, as expressed in the records of councils, the directives to missionaries, the diaries of They should form part of a social pioneers. history of each territory. This is particularly important in the areas where we took over from the Germans in 1918 and from the Italians in 1945. One such historical study of education in the forts and trading posts on the Gold Coast from 1756 to 1856 was carried out by an African educationist who consulted records in Copenhagen and The Hague as well as in London, and who presented the results for his M.A. thesis in 1949.

There are two fields of study which are concerned with the integration of the individual and with the integration of communities, both in relation to education in the schools. Professor Kluckhohn in the preface to his study of Navajo

childhood says:

'The main trends of personality are set early and the hope of the future rests with the oncoming generation. Social change which is to be most constructive and least destructive must be suitable for the personality foundation created early in life by the treatment children receive in their own families and in the schools.'

In addition to the more comprehensive sociological studies which may be tribal or regional in their scope, we need smaller scale community studies which will place the school in the total setting of the neighbourhood. Only with such background studies can we begin to assess the reciprocal relationship of the school and the community. Very little has been done hitherto in the field of Personality and Culture studies in the colonial territories. The inter-cultural setting of these areas and the ever widening diffusion of English institutions and English thought will present additional problems in these studies, but the need to resolve the problems only becomes the more imperative.

In most of the teacher training centres in the colonies the psychology text books are written in terms of English children in an English setting. There are very few studies of West Indian or African or Malay children in their home setting. This lack of material makes nonsense of most of the child psychology taught in these training centres, except in the rare instances where observation of children is substituted for textbook learning. Studies of infants and young children need to be made everywhere, and to be related not only to the training of teachers but to all classes in mother-

craft and infant care. These studies of children must be made in situ and should be carried through to the adolescent stage. The school systems we have introduced have thrown out of gear in many areas the socially planned relationship between physiological and sociological maturity in the indigenous systems.

Studies such as these will it is hoped find their place in the new Institutes of Education which form part of some of the new Universities and University Colleges in colonial areas. They might initiate and plan research for which material could

be collected on a much wider basis.

This is however only one side of the intercultural situation, where the need to make pioneer studies in the local cultural tradition is imperative. There is our side of the picture too the elements of the English cultural tradition which are already present in the educational systems overseas and which will increase, especially at the higher levels of education. We have spoken of the need for analysis of our own institutions. But no scholarly analysis is in itself adequate. We have got to be inspired by an informed confidence in our own cultural tradition which is certain of the contribution it has to give.

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