

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 5517 700 Fax 5517844
website: www.africa-union.org

**FIFTH CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN
MINISTERS OF CULTURE
10-14 DECEMBER 2005
NAIROBI, KENYA**

**CULTURE-IN- EDUCATION
And
EDUCATION-IN-CULTURE**

By: Pai OBANYA

1. Culture and Education are inseparable, as they are simply two sides of the same coin. The two concepts can in fact be said to be indistinguishable, as the primary definition of Education is *Acculturation*.

2. Every human society - whatever its level of technical evolution - devotes considerable attention to transmitting its cultural heritage to the young. This trans-generational transmission of culture has helped to cement human solidarity and to ensure the continued survival of societies over the ages. Before the emergence of schools as specialized agencies, Education took place in society, where the young and the not so young became educated by simply *living their culture*.

3. Education (in its true sense) was in fact first threatened by schooling, and most societies have been questioning the educational effectiveness of schools ever since they were invented. In the case of Africa, it was not only sovereignty that was lost with colonialism. Its Education was also lost, and has not yet been found or reinvented, in spite of well-documented post-colonial reforms. We have had cause to make the same point elsewhere in the following words.

The transformation of Africa should not lose sight of the deep roots of Education: its being seriously anchored on the people's culture, so that we do not make the people extinct by destroying their culture. What Africa then lost with colonisation was what it shared with every other society in the world – an Education that keeps you psychologically in your socio-cultural frame. With colonisation, Education became equated with mere schooling. In traditional societies Education for All was taken for granted; in a colonial setting, Schooling for All became a problem¹

4. This paper is concerned with the Education that Africa lost and how this can be found and resuscitated for genuine development of the mind and soul of the continent. The discussion situates the problematic of the interface of Education and Culture in Africa at three levels: the *mega level* (the wider societal environment), the *macro level* of educational policy development, curricula, and other inputs into education programmes, the *micro level*, at which direct action is taken to educate in schools and classrooms, as well as in the out-of-school learning situations.

THE MEGA LEVEL

5. This level is concerned with the overall environment in which Culture and Education would need to thrive, and the discussion is about ways in which various stakeholders can create enabling conditions for this to happen. The significant stakeholders here are governments, the elite class, the 'wananchi', (civil society) and the culture professional/activist.



Government

6. In the special context of Africa, governments will have to take the drastic step of moving from merely 'talking Culture' to promoting and projecting it. The practical implications of this statement are that:
1. Ministries of Culture should move from being backyard departments to being part of the frontline, like Finance, Education, Health, Agriculture, etc
 2. Culture should become a transversal activity, guiding and featuring in all other areas of government activity, as Cultural considerations do help to determine the impact of specific interventions and programmes of governments
 3. Governments should themselves radiate Culture by *living* it – promoting national culture by its practice of governance, the organisation of activities, the design of cities and buildings, the funding of the Culture ministry, etc
 4. Governments should give practical application to all pan-African and international conventions on cultural development to which they have been signatory.
 5. Government should also use Culture as a key instrument for nation building, and of regional integration, by emphasizing those cultural traits that unite the people and by dismantling the cultural unity barriers erected by colonialism and its aftermaths.

The Elite Class

7. On the part of the elite class, the greatest challenge is that of 'de-kasumbalisation'. This means getting out of the mind set that equates Culture simply with its supposed outward manifestations – dances and songs and other forms of 'traditional' activities. This is the mindset that sees tradition as the opposite of 'modernity', that sees unintelligent mimicking of foreign cultures as progress. It is also the mindset that sees culture simply as a domain for the 'wananchi' – persons who should dance and sing to the pleasure of tourists and to satisfy the relaxation needs of the leisurely class. It is also that point of view that sees Culture only as occasional celebrations, instead that *all-pervading determinant of what we are and the way we are*.

8. The elite class should also lead by example. One very strong threat to the development of African culture is the trend among the African elite class to use English, French, or Portuguese as home languages, as the 'first' languages of their children. This is in the mistaken belief that the practice would give a head start when the children get to school. The practice is spreading so fast that one can predict a near future in which the 'educated' in African societies will be the ones that lack proficiency in any national (i.e., African) language. This poses a threat of the children of today's elite becoming internal linguistic expatriates.

9. The elite class has also often sounded the death knell on educational reforms that have attempted to valorise indigenous languages. This class

makes the education policies, but educates its children outside the official programmes that it has itself authored. The wider community thus gets the signal that educational reforms are for the poor only. This is one strong explanation for the failure of educational reforms on the continent, i.e. their rejection by the ordinary citizen as being inferior.

10. Direct action by governments would be the key here. This would be in the form of targeted cultural re-orientation programmes. However, preaching should be accompanied by precepts. Therefore, government's own efforts at radiating Culture (in the ways already highlighted) would help to reinforce any sensitisation programme.

The Culture Practitioner/Activist

11. Culture practitioners and activists (especially the culture intelligentsia) would have to play the role of 'culture vanguard' for the mega picture to be complete. Their role will be mainly that of destroying a number of myths that have distorted intellectual discourse on African Culture. What is perhaps the most harmful of these myths is that which places African Culture in the realms of anthropology (the study of 'primary' societies), instead of that of sociology that studies 'modern, societies. Closely related to this is the myth that equates African cultural values and ways of life with the past, in contrast to that culture being sold to the African, which has to do with the future and with 'progress'. The same myth equates the African mind with emotions and the western mind with logic, thus implying that logical reasoning and scientific behaviour are alien to African culture.

12. It is also incumbent on the African culture practitioner to fight for the elimination of derogatory terms that have long been used to describe Africa, the African and the African way of life. These include such annoying statements that some explorer 'discovered' some place in Africa, that some missionary undertook a civilising mission to some place in Africa. They also include references to Blacks as 'Negro', to our languages as 'dialects', to our peoples as 'tribes', to our countries as 'territories', to our culture artefacts as 'fetish', to our vegetables as 'wild herbs'.

13. The problem here is that the use of these terms has become so ingrained in the minds of Africans themselves that even persons who ought to understand the pejorative intent of these terms, still use them to describe Africa and Africans.

14. There are also other well-entrenched misconceptions and over-simplifications of the cultural life of the Africans. The one that has gained very strong grounds is the grouping of Africans into anglophone, francophone, and lusophone as a cultural reality.

Such arbitrary classifications tend to underplay the stronger cultural ties that cut across the artificial boundaries created by colonialism. The same oversimplification is seen in the grouping of African societies as Christian or Islamic. That tends to ignore the trait of 'africanness', which is a lot stronger than the traits conveyed by the two great religions. Culture, we are told, is 'dynamic'. Every culture develops by borrowing, by adapting. The African culture activist would have to lead the battle to qualify such statements. They should address such questions as 'if Africa should be the only borrower', and 'if borrowing and adapting mean abandoning what you have'. We should even try to see if Africa has not been over borrowing foreign culture the way it has done with foreign money, whether or not Africa is leading itself into a culture debt trap.

15. The culture practitioner also has to help to combat the negative image of Africa that is the stock-in-trade of the international media. For example, television programmes titled 'inside Asia' will likely talk about investments and markets, while the ones titled 'inside Africa' will talk of war, hunger and disease. This creates the impression that nothing good ever comes out of Africa and that there is nothing to learn from that continent. In the impressionable minds of the young African, the media helps to develop an aversion for Africa (where all things are portrayed as sad and ugly) while reinforcing a strong thirst for the external world, where all things are supposedly bright and beautiful.

16. Above all, culture practitioners will have to re-create the African hero, in terms of people, places, inventions and creations. Their work has to portray the achievements of Africa and the contributions of Africans to world civilization. They have to be in constant touch with the noble efforts of Africans (including those in the Diaspora) in improving the conditions of humanity, in sports and games, in advancing knowledge and ideas, in promoting global understanding, in heroically enduring hardships, deprivations, and discrimination. These would be materials that can be harnessed in developing appropriate curricula for culture-rich education programmes in Africa.

The domain of culture-related educational materials will equally include:

1. Production of school and popular editions of the UNESCO History of Africa project
2. Production of atlases that portray Africa correctly
3. Making creative works by Africans more readily available
4. Popularisation of the biographies of Africans who have contributed to changing Africa and the entire world

The Ordinary People

17. The WANANCHI (the ordinary people) have been the custodians of African culture in the true sense of the term. In many parts of Africa, a large majority of the 'wananchi' is still considered 'uneducated'.

This is due to one great paradox that has characterised education in the continent, where those who *live* the culture but who have not been to school, are considered ‘uneducated’, while those who have been through school but who do may not necessarily possess the culture of the people, are considered ‘educated’. In societies in which education has not lost touch with acculturation, to be educated is also to be cultured.

18. The ordinary African is not seeking a definition of African culture. *Life and living* is all that Culture is about in the minds of Africa’s ‘real people’. For the unreal African, now searching for cultural identity, it would be pertinent to reiterate a point we had made in another context.

In spite of the various influences to which Africa has been exposed over the ages (and these include heavy doses of ‘assimilative medicines’ by its colonisers, evangelisers, ‘modernisers’, ‘development partners’, etc.), Africa still remains Africa. The ‘educated’, ‘evolved’, ‘assimilated’, widely travelled African still has something authentically African in him or her. And this is not just the colour of the skin. It is this authentically African trait that has ensured the survival that has ensured the survival of African entities, societies and communities (not to be confused with ‘states’ or ‘countries’) in spite of the overblown stories of problems, disasters and woes from the continent. This authentically African trait has also made it difficult for persons from other cultures to fully understand the African²

19. The point being made is that de-alienating Education from society in Africa can be achieved by first involving the ordinary people, not as onlookers (as has been the practice), but as determiners of the future path of Education, as the owners of the Culture that should be fully harnessed for genuine educational reform and development. Both government and the culture practitioner owe it a duty to institutionalise this popular participation in cultural and educational development. Until this is done, Africa would remain plagued with inauthentic copies of Culture, instead of dealing with the real thing, and Education would be a victim (as is already the case) of our continuing mishandling of Culture.

THE MACRO LEVEL

20. The macro level is concerned with education policy, the curriculum and all other inputs into an education programme. This level should take a cue from the mega level and transform the enabling environment created at that level into policy directives and curriculum, teaching and learning guidelines for the schools.

Educational policy

21. What is needed here is something that has been conspicuously missing from the educational reforms carried out on the continent over the years – bringing the principles of African traditional education (as summarised in table one) to bear on ‘modern’ education policies. The table shows Education as a lifelong affair, well ingrained into societal life, and involving all groups in society.

22. In addition, a culture-oriented education policy should be a cyclic process that does not draw a sharp line of demarcation between formulation and implementation. It should also be one in which education for all is 'for all' and also 'by all'. Thus the situation should not be one in which policy is formulated by the elite class for others. Such a policy would include strong culture related directives as:

1. Languages of instruction, and particularly commitment to the development of indigenous languages for use in Education.
2. Educational materials development, and particularly the development of national authorship, printing and publishing
3. Commitment to the development of other cultural industries that can impact on Education (film, the media, traditional medicine, music/dance, etc)
4. Mobilisation of other societal resources (cultural events and practices, crafts, farms, work places) for enriching teaching and learning.
5. Development of school architecture and classroom environments that conform with local climate and culture
6. School calendars that blend neatly with local work and leisure programming
7. Building of strong school-community ties

Table I: Organisational Set-Up For Traditional African Education³

<i>Stage of Life</i>	<i>Educational Goal</i>	<i>Place of Education</i>	<i>Agencies of Education</i>
Childhood	Primary Socialisation	The Home The Extended Family The Community	Parents All Older Relations Elders in the Neighbourhood The Age Grade Community Based Organisations
Adolescence	Life Skills Acquisition	THE COMMUNITY (all places of work, recreation, religious observance, etc) The Initiation Ground	Parents Community Elders The Age Grades The Guilds Secrete Societies Games and Sports Clubs
Adulthood	Social and Organisational Skills Development	THE COMMUNITY	Community rulers and elders Community special service groups Special interest groupings The Guilds

23. Culture can also be relied upon to address the challenges of access, gender equity, relevance, quality and efficiency currently plaguing the

development of education in Africa. In more concrete terms, employing culture-routed strategies, as shown in table two, can contribute to the search for viable solutions to these problems.

24. It must be acknowledged that the above culture-routed solutions have long been recognised by the educational development profession and that they form the major tools for promoting the on-going EFA – Education for All – programmes.

Table II: Culture-Routed Solutions to Major Educational Development Challenges

Challenge Area	Culture-Routed Solutions
ACCESS: schools physically, socially, psychologically, economically inaccessible to children	Strong community involvement, relying on culturally accepted structures Use of traditional structures (homesteads, playgrounds, etc) for schooling
GENDER EQUITY: poor participation of GIRLS (their entry into school, retention, progression, completion)	Adapting schooling to local realities Using culturally acceptable mobilisation strategies Attending to the special needs of girls
RELEVANCE: aligning educational processes to the perceived needs of communities and learners	Use of Local culture/local activities as the substance of Education Use of methods, materials and content appropriate to the environment Community language for laying the foundation for learning
QUALITY: the extent to which Education makes a permanent positive impact on the learner	Learning based on activities and socially acceptable skills and competences (instead of rote learning) Use of the learners' language for deep understanding
EFFICIENCY: elimination of wastage through a judicious mix and use of resources	Community involvement in school management Active and culturally imbued teaching-learning activities that make schooling interesting Activities that enhance relevance and quality (as already outlined)

The Curriculum

OBJECTIVES

25. Promoting African culture in education and educating the African through culture would require *a functional curriculum* with the tripartite objectives of:

- *Developing the deepest sense of pride in being African*, through a deep understanding of THE PRIDE OF AFRICA: the mother tongue or the community language, the African world view, Africa's contribution to world civilisation over the ages, the orature and literature of Africa, the creativity of Africans in various forms, Great Africans past and present, contemporary Africa from an African perspective, Africa's plans for its future in the emerging global community.
- *Access to a wider world* of people, knowledge, techniques, ideas and practices: the 'official' languages and their literatures, mathematics, science and technology, informatics, tools and methods of social analysis, western and oriental philosophies and religions.
- *Personal Development for Contribution to Social Transformation*: A variety of core skills for lifelong learning, vocational awareness/vocational activities, entrepreneurship, creativity, communication and inter-personal conduct, self-awareness, etc.⁴

ORGANISATION

26. To give education in Africa a sound culture base and content, it would be necessary to act on two fronts. The first front is to enrich the content and ensure a re-orientation of conventional culture subjects like language and literature, the performing arts, aesthetic subjects, and social studies. The second is to develop Culture as a distinct subject area, to be consciously taught at all levels of Education. It might be easier in most African countries to begin by enriching that which already exists.

27. Such a task would require the collaboration of culture professionals and the 'wananchi' in identify areas needing enrichment. The process should not be simply one of adding on new topics. It should not lead to curriculum overload. Instead, it should emphasise re-defining the objectives, seeking news ways of organising teaching and learning to achieve the set objectives, and re-orienting teachers into a new way of looking at African culture and of radiating it through the school system.

28. The second task, which is the development of Culture as a distinct discipline, should reflect the different requirements of various levels of Education, as illustrated in table three. It is possible for a school system to allow options in the case of the first approach, probably owing to lack of facilities.

The second approach should, however, result in the emergence of a compulsory culture subject.

29. Both approaches call for innovation. African universities should take up the challenge by:

1. Devoting more attention to the promotion of culture disciplines
2. Making relevant research results readily accessible to policy formulators and curriculum/material developers
3. Re-orienting teachers and school managers
4. Radiating African culture in their own environment and activities

CURRICULUM CONTENT

30. Figure one below should be regarded as a general guideline, as content is best determined at the local school management level. The important point is that the foundation is laid by being rooted in local culture. The learner's horizon is then progressively expanded to include the nation, the continent, and the world at large. At every level, the entrenched community/national culture is the reference point. In the African context, it would be desirable to emphasize the unity of cultures across regions as well as Africa's role in the emerging world in which Africa must be a full (and not a marginal) member --- a strong membership for which African culture will be seriously affirmed.

Table III: Curriculum Organisation for CULTURE as a discipline

Level of Education	Culture Education Strategy	Main Features
Primary and Pre-primary	Implicit in the entire process	The local environment and local culture (including community language) should pervade this cycle of Education
Junior secondary	Integrated into ALL disciplines	A step ahead of the implicit curriculum organisation strategy. Culture is specifically mentioned, and there is reference to it in all forms, but it is not treated as an examination subject
Senior secondary	Distinct Discipline	Raising a conscious awareness of Culture, building upon work at lower levels of Education, and making Culture a compulsory, examination subject
Tertiary	Core Discipline	More detailed, more analytical studies, some comparative studies of other cultures, culture-related practical/field project

Fig. 1: A Suggested Curriculum Content Chain



THE MICRO LEVEL

31. This is the level of school organisation and management, as well as that of classroom teaching and learning. The foregoing discussions have shown that the tone has to be correctly set at the mega and macro levels of educational development. It is important that the school administrator and the classroom teacher are fully involved in all aspects of the tasks undertaken at those two levels to enrich school activities and children learning through Culture and to develop the acquisition of Culture through Education. This is one way of ensuring that those who deal with learners have fully internalised the new ideas being canvassed.

32. The school administrator's role is to ensure that the term 'Curriculum' assumes its full meaning of 'total school atmosphere' by creating a school environment that radiates Culture. This implies a change in management style, to accommodate the involvement of persons who *live* African Culture. It also means building bridges and reaching out to the community for cultural resources. Above all, it involves bringing Culture out of the backbench of once-in-a-year out-of-context school festivals, performed by a few and merely applauded by the rest. Instead Culture will occupy the front seat, to be infused in all aspects of organisation and management of the school.

33. The classroom teacher will also have to change from someone who simply TELLS to someone who will use the classroom to guide the process of Acculturation. This will not be an easy task, as it would require some professional value re-orientation. Guiding the process of acculturation demands that the teacher:

1. Lives the Culture in question
2. Becomes more conversant with traditional methods of acculturation
3. Takes greater care to ensure that classroom activities are linked with socially and culturally useful skills

34. The average classroom teacher will therefore need considerable professional support. The support should come from the immediate community, from the materials generated by the culture practitioner, and from the overall enabling environment created by government.

CONCLUSIONS

35. Promoting education-in-culture and culture-in education will help in addressing the issue of relevance, which has eluded educational reforms in post-colonial Africa. It will also lead to a desirable paradigm shift that returns Education to its original meaning of Acculturation, thereby contributing to rediscovering the education that Africa lost with colonisation.

36. The tasks involved however require radical actions on the part of governments. Very little can be achieved at the school level if the 'grand decisions' are not taken at the mega and micro levels. Education and Culture issues should therefore be seen in the larger perspective of African cultural development issues. The seriousness with which these are addressed will, to a large extent, determine the seriousness with which Culture will permeate Education on the continent.

END NOTES

¹ OBANYA, Pai (2005): *Blind Diagnosis And Dangerous Curative Measures*, Union of Education of Norway Seminar, April 5 2005

² OBANYA, Pai (1998): *A Three-Pronged Approach to Transforming African Universities*, *Futures* 3/7, 681-691

³ OBANYA, Pai (2005), op. cit.

⁴ OBANYA, Pai (2004): *Functional Education for the Liberation of Africa* – Chapter Three of educating for the knowledge Economy, Mosuro Books, 22-38