

2-2000

Review of: Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary issues and future concerns

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alternatives beyond references to “development,” “countervailing tendencies,” and “new pedagogic strategies” (p. 22). With the exception of Krishna Kumar’s critical analysis of the pivotal 1966 Education Commission Report offering Gandhian alternatives to the Western blueprint ultimately adopted in India’s plan for education and national development (pp. 79–98), the essays in the book are not focused in that direction. The editors’ hint that new perspectives can be derived from studies of the relationship of education, development, and underdevelopment thus remains as a challenge to be taken up by their readers. Given the wide range of new source materials available for exploring India’s educational experience, scholars interested in the theme of this book have much to look forward to as the new wave of Indian educational scholarship continues to rise.

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Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa: Contemporary Issues and Future Concerns edited by Cynthia Szymanski Sunal. New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998. 246 pp. \$65.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-8153-1645-3.

A contributing volume to the Garland Reference Books in International Education, *Schooling in Sub-Saharan Africa* is a welcome addition to the slim collection of reference books concerning education in Africa today. The book’s seven chapters, written by editor Cynthia Szymanski Sunal and nine other contributors, vary in quality of scholarship; consequently, the volume’s overall contribution is an introduction to important topics rather than a deep academic discussion of educational research, its implications, and viable solutions.

In her overview, Sunal alerts us to “six issues and future concerns” unifying the essays in the volume: “(1) the objectives of mass education, (2) funding, (3) inequities in access to education, (4) curriculum, (5) instructional methodology, and (6) research needs and efforts” (p. xvi). While these six issues are quite appropriate for a reference book of this nature, it is unfortunate that neither do all of the contributors fully address them in their respective chapters, nor are the six topics related to the entire region as the title of the book implies. It is rather a book primarily about Nigeria with a lesser emphasis on Zimbabwe. Too many chapters use Nigeria in their case studies as a proxy to exemplify the topics and issues of an entire continent. Considering the volume’s announced scope, this is less than adequate. While Nigeria may share many of what Sunal often terms “stressors” (p. xi) with the rest of the region, the heavy emphasis on one nation as a case study implies the very homogeneity that Sunal warns against when she states that sub-Saharan Africa has a “diversity in culture, geography, and perspectives” (pp. xvi).

With varying degrees of scholarly quality, the chapters cover contemporary and significant issues. Section 1, “The Education System,” includes three chapters. The first, written by the editor, focuses on “Primary School Education in Sub-Saharan

Africa” and includes a long inventory of contemporary problems created by the stressors of African society today. Sunal’s competent treatment of her six issues is marred somewhat by a writing style that jumps from point to point and by a tendency to overstate rather obvious generalities. Her recommendations for the future are based on evidence from her Nigerian research, which may or may not be applicable to the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Dennis W. Sunal and Mary E. Haas’s chapter, “Issues for Higher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa,” begins with a competent summary of the history of higher education in colonial and postcolonial Africa and then discusses current problems and possible solutions in higher education, including (as does Sunal’s chapter) some very pertinent observations among a wealth of suggestions. But the authors end with a case study examining motivation in Nigerian universities that has little seeming connection to their first two sections, leaving the reader searching for the main focus of the chapters.

The volume’s strongest chapter is Benson Honig’s well-written “The Significance of the Informal Sector to Education in Sub-Saharan Africa.” Honig’s thoroughly documented research offers a deep analysis of the relationships between formal and nonformal education and the informal and formal labor sectors. It analyzes complex issues related to these institutions and, in fulfillment of the book’s title, does so for the entire region of sub-Saharan Africa. One of Honig’s most interesting and valuable sections studies microentrepreneurial skill acquisition and the historic use of apprenticeship as an educational institution. He points out that “the subject of apprenticeship itself has not been comprehensively studied, so it remains unclear how effective and efficient the learning component is” (p. 85). Considering the current popularity of Lev Vygotsky’s scaffolding approach to learning, it would seem that researchers of nonformal African education could now profitably analyze the success of apprenticeship teaching in Africa and investigate the possibility of transferring some of these methods to the formal sector of African education.

The second half of the book deals with curriculum issues and begins with a chapter on “Science Education in Sub-Saharan Africa” written by Dennis W. Sunal, R. Lynn Jones, and Peter Okebukola. The chapter adequately outlines major issues related to science education, especially those related to language, gender, funding, and technology, but a heavy and repetitious emphasis on the problems of cultural interpretation of “science” tends to detract from the authors’ main points.

Chapters 5 and 6, respectively, discuss mathematics and citizenship education. Both chapters lack academic rigor, especially when it comes to adequate citations for entire pages demanding footnoting of facts about the history and current concerns of their topics. The sweeping generalities of chapter 5 concerning culturally appropriate mathematics teaching methods are based on few citations beyond references to research in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe mathematics syllabus, and while the chapter offers some interesting suggestions regarding mathematics pedagogy, its scholarly indiscipline detracts from its value. Chapter 6, on citizenship education, again employs Nigeria as its only case study and lacks the support of relevant citations and a more complete referencing of the abundant literature germane to the central argument, including the works of John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and Julius Nyerere.

Osayimwense Osa's concluding chapter, "Using Indigenous Literatures in Sub-Saharan African Schools," is well written and addresses the book's six issues in relation to all levels of education. It outlines the destruction of African literatures since the colonial introduction of European schooling and warns of the impending death of indigenous literatures. The author is perhaps overly optimistic in his assumption that all of today's African children still hear indigenous oral literature at home that school teachers can use as building blocks in their classes; the unfortunate fact is that too many modern African homes no longer have elders available as they once did to connect children with their rich heritage. Osa may also be too sanguine about the possibilities for the spread of indigenous literatures, as when he comments that "when Africans realize that they should not be absolutely dependent on printed materials . . . scarcity of books will no longer be seen as a disaster" (p. 198). Whether we like it or not, the world's increasing dependence on the printed word, along with the decline of societal reverence for the elderly, means that more than ever the only reliable way to preserve the heritage of oral literatures is to reduce them to writing. Until educators and publishers recognize this fact and acknowledge the precious value of oral literature, it will remain in the background of African and especially European school syllabi.

Many of the volume's most serious problems could have been eliminated by tighter editing. Too many of the essays are marred by lax writing and undocumented arguments, and the entire book suffers from redundancies, both individual and collective. Partly as a consequence, much of importance that might have been included has been overlooked. Perhaps the most serious shortcomings in scope are the book's superficial treatment of gender inequality and its lack of emphasis on socioeconomic and urban-rural disparities in access to education in the subcontinent. Nor is there any mention of the tragic impact on education of the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which is decimating school children and teachers in many parts of Africa. These criticisms aside, this volume will find a useful place in the literature initiating the beginning student of African education on many of the important contemporary issues and concerns for the future of education in sub-Saharan Africa.

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International Perspectives on the Design of Technology Supported Learning Environments
edited by Stella Vosniadou, Erik De Corte, Robert Glaser, and Heinz Mandl.
Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996. 396 pp. \$79.95 (cloth). ISBN
0-8058-1853-7.

This compilation of 18 independent articles provides a hearty dose of both theory and practice. A project inspired by a NATO Advanced Study Institute Summit on psychological and educational effects of technology-based learning, *International Perspectives on the Design of Technology Supported Learning Environments* is intended to