Critical Indigenous African Education and Knowledge

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The issues raised in this paper (presented in June 2001 at UCLA in partial satisfaction of a graduate course requirement) address a preliminary African centered approach to the question of indigenous African education and knowledge in contemporary society, and thus: calls for critical discourse regarding its utility; suggest that indigenous African theoretical and philosophical discussion should consider an Afrocentric focus; discuss how indigenous African education and knowledge and how it should work to resurrect itself from invisibility in the history of education; there is a need for a critical corrective theory in African education; acknowledge that education and knowledge existed in Africa before Islamic or Western schooling; the story of indigenous and modern African education and knowledge should not remain dormant in untrue assumptions; provides examples of the usefulness of indigenous knowledge via Nigeria (Opata 1998); suggest that there is a need for new lines of communication between schooling and indigenous education; examines via Semali (1999) the distinctions between indigenous African knowledge and other forms of knowledge and the obstacles to its implementation; review the question of African writing history; wherein misconception prevails that Africa was not familiar with literature and art before contact with the Western world; list the many scripts in Africa as examples of a literary tradition; acknowledge that in the arena of science and technology historically and presently, Africa is generally unrecognized or extremely discounted; there is a myth that an indigenous scientific or technological community did not exist in traditional African society which illustrates the complexity of the modern struggle for African science concerning articulation, cultural ethos and scientific principles; there is a need for a full investigation of the history of African science and science education; Africa and African education need a critical examination of its mission, goals and objectives that moves beyond the questions of select donor agencies and narrow national issues; African education needs a critical theory to extract the best of indigenous African thought and practice; and in conclusion, this work outlines some ideas for developing a critical African education theory, and a progressive Pan African agenda via the directional insight of the philosophy of the African Renaissance movement and the African Union.

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Methical Approach

This paper provides an African centered approach to the question of indigenous African education and knowledge. Thus, the principal issues of inquiry place African education and knowledge acquisition in an Afrocentric dialectic to engage critical discussion and suggest new ideas for reconstructing education policy in contemporary Africa, and thus it echoes A. Babs Fafunwa's (1982:9) axiom that:

No study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the traditional or indigenous educational system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity.

Thus, this perspective calls for critical discourse regarding the utility of African education, the placement of indigenous African theoretical and philosophical ideas at the center of African educational policy formation; the resurrection of African epistemology, and the institution of a corrective critical theory of African education and knowledge. Examples of this perspective are revealed in the work of George J. Sefa Dei (1994) and Elleni Tedla (1995). Dei in his elucidation of Afrocentricity and pedagogy suggest that the examination of Afrocentricity is instinctively an alternative way of knowing the world, and thus an "…investigation and understanding of phenomena from a perspective grounded in African-centered values…that calls for"… the validation of African experiences and histories, as well as a critique of the continued exclusion and marginalization of African knowledge systems, educational texts, mainstream academic knowledge, and scholarship (Dei 1994: 3-5).

Instructively, this paradigm, and the entire dialectics of Afrocentric theory consequently allows space for a holistic discussion of the challenges of African education, and assign the idea that there are "…commonalities in African peoples' culture(s) that should be interrogated and investigated to serve as the basis for Afrocentric unity…(Dei 1994:7)."

And it also recognizes that "…there is no one, single indigenous form of education [or culture] in Africa" but rather a dynamic of ethnic, historical and social factors that often make generalizations problematic or simply inadequate (Bray 2000:27).

Secondly, Tedla (1995) in her call for a new form of African education rooted in the positive aspects of indigenous thought (philosophy) and education introduces the concept of Sankofan education as a buffer against the uncritical and often unconscious negative images about Africa that has lead some of Africa's young to value the sensibilities of Africa by Western values, and thus devaluate the traditional African way of life. Hence, she rightfully defines Sankofan education as an African centered education anchored in indigenous African thought that judiciously borrows ideas and technologies from other peoples of the world, and thus, her cornerstone attributes rest upon: (1) African cultural heritage, (2) the transcending of ethnic and national blinders to appreciate the relatedness of the African world community experience, (3) the placement of Africa and African values at the center of investigation, (4) the preparation of learners to contribute to society, and (5) five acquisitive goals concerning: cultural and academic excellence, spiritual development, community building, and physical fitness and health (Telda 1995:209-211).

These perspectives therefore provide a pivotal projective for answering some key questions about indigenous education and knowledge in Africa, and forthrightly place African ways of knowing and being in a historical and social context, and therefore, ripe for theoretical examination and, critical theory construction.

Introduction

In discussing indigenous and other forms of education in Africa, we can begin by asking fundamental questions about what is education and knowledge, and secondly, questions about its relationship to the cultivation of a truly African pedagogical ethos.

Education in a definitional context can generally be thought of as the transmission of values and the accumulated knowledge of a society. Thus, it is essentially a societal instrument for the expansion of human culture. In contrast, knowledge is a state of knowing or understanding gained or retained through experience or study. For the purpose herein, these short definitions provide a functional seed to the cultivation of an African educational and pedagogical discourse.

And retrospectively, the transmission of values and the state of knowing or understanding gained or retained through experience or study in Africa began in ancient Egypt about 3000 BC years ago, at the beginning of the history of civilization. The nature of this early education was predominately in the hands of priests and the intellectual elite within ancient Egyptian theocracy. Thus, they instructed in the humanities, and all subjects of the sciences, including medicine, mathematics, and geometry, and also in the more applied sciences of architecture, engineering, and sculpture (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 1997:2).

This early pedagogical activity in ancient Africa has perplexed many then and even today, and thus should quiet discussion about Africa being introduced to formal education upon the arrival of Islamic or Western schooling or other external means of schooling. However, in a rush to negatively judge Africa and its contributions to human civilization, some have continued to circulate incorrect information to give support to false assumptions.

For example, Nwomonoh (1998) in his preface to a contemporary survey on education and development in Africa mistakenly states "before the introduction of Western style schooling the only formal schooling received by millions of people in Africa was the Islamic system, and it has much older roots in the continent that does the Western system." Nwomonoh's statement is unfortunate in view of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, especially in ancient Egypt and other select regions of Africa (as mentioned below). In critique, either he didn't consider Egypt as a part of Africa (many academics are blindfolded by the 'south of the Sahara' hoopla) or he simply overlooked an abundance of significant research that point to a well developed early Egyptian educational system that interestingly enough, established two formal education systems (one for scribes, and the other for priests) and taught many subjects, in addition to reading and writing (ibid).

In debatable contrast, Africa is not the historical or educational stepchild of Islamic or Western education when history verifies that an African process of education was transmitted and accumulated throughout the continent before the advent of invasion or colonialism, as represented in ancient Nubia in the east, the Great Zimbabwe in the south, and at the University of Sankore in the west. Notwithstanding, ancient and modern notables such as Peseshet (an ancient Egyptian female physician of the Middle Kingdom), Mansa Musa (the emperor of ancient Mali who among other activity, built the University of Sankore at Timbuktu), Queen Nzinga (a queen who resisted Portuguese colonialism), Nelson Mandela (former president and political prisoner in South Africa), and the multitude of lesser-known others who worked to create a sustainable human future in Africa.

This backdrop thus points to the dilemma of African education and knowledge as we examine prerequisite questions for discourse on indigenous literacy, science and technology, language and literature, and other topics that can introduce a progressive theory of critical African education. Therefore, in juxtaposition, this paper will review issues surrounding indigenous knowledge and education, the myth of no written languages in Africa, the relevance of science and technology to African education, and discourse on critical theory.

Indigenous Knowledge and Education

Indigenous African education and knowledge has generally been understood as a simplistic process of socialization involving the preparation of children for work in the home, the village and within a select ethnic domain. Thus, most contemporary discussions on indigenous African education rest in the shadow of Western globalization ideas about structural adjustment, etc.; and congruently it is projected as a stagnant, limited, and inoperative paradigm which pushes some to conclude that any serious discussion about the indigenous transmission of values and its accumulated knowledge in Africa is a waste of time. However, via an African centered synthesis one can begin to appreciate the particulars of indigenous ways of knowing and their epistemologies.

For example, in examining indigenous African education and knowledge closely, we see that it involves understanding education as: a means to an end; social responsibility; spiral and moral values; participation in ceremonies, rituals; imitation; recitation; demonstration; sport; epic; poetry; reasoning; riddles; praise; songs; story-telling; proverbs, folktales; word games; puzzles; tongue-twisters; dance; music; plant biology; environmental education, and other education centered activity that can be acknowledged and examined. And second, in a cultural-political process, it involves historical information about how Mansa Musa (1312-1337) developed Timbuktu as a commercial city and center of learning where scholars learned theology and law at the mosque of Sankore that subsequently laid the foundation for the University of Sankore which become a learning center not only for Africa, but also for the 'Middle East', with eminent scholars like Ahmed Baba (DeGraft Johnson 1954: 98) who authored more than forty books on diverse subjects, and owned a 1,600 volume library in the sixteenth century (Jackson 1980: 217)

Ergo, the real story (or glory) of indigenous African education and knowledge ironically remains dormant in slick misconceptions about African inferiority. Hence, some of the particulars of African culture and knowledge production that would otherwise educate the populous remain hidden, unless a pro-active community of scholars rescue it, and give it new meaning and significance.

For example, Opata (1998) in his study of Igbo culture added new light on the tradition of presenting the kola nut in Nigeria via the Igbo, hence the indigenous and modern aspects of African education and knowledge unite to explain a particular in Ibo society, the exchange of the kola nut (Oji) representing: (1) goodwill between friends, (2) a formal signal of the beginning of a meeting, (3) greeting a visitor in peace, (4) respect between a younger person and an elder, and (5) most importantly, the *itako oji onu* (Ligbo) process of breaking the kola nut and sharing it to represent an instrument of reconciliation (Opata 1998: 100-102, 107).

Instructively this information and similar data outlines a dynamic for a true African education that embody lessons of "…mutual respect for the opinions of others, lessons of deference to elders, lessons about the importance of dialogue, lessons about conflict negotiation, the spirit of tolerance and forgiveness, and the spirit to face the future with an open mind" that can become a way to involve parents in the curriculum, and establish new lines of communication between schooling and indigenous knowledge (Opata 1998: 117).

In recognition of the complexities of indigenous African knowledge, the work of Semali (1999) in Tanzania, and his African centered dialectic on the interplay of indigenous folk knowledge and modern (Western) curriculum practice in African schools is important to our discussion. Conversantly, Semali outline the distinctions between indigenous African knowledge and other forms of knowledge to report that: (1) indigenous African knowledge (IAK) does not derive its origins or standing from the individual but from the collective epistemological understanding and rationalization of community; (2) IAK is about what local people know and do and what local communities have known and done for generations, (3) the ability to use community knowledge produced from local history form important literacy skills critical to survival in an African context; and (4) what local people know about their environment must be included in the planning and implementation process of education.

In addition, and possibly most important theoretically, Semali introduced the idea of indigenous literacy as information communicated via local culture and languages that reflects local innovations and techniques in activities such as fishing, pest control (via Sudan and Egypt) to herbs and plant usage to manage local diseases (Semali 1999:307-308).

Continuing in his examination and definitional posture, Semali also: (1) provides an observational critique based on his experiences in Tanzania; and reports that IAK was understood by his students as unofficial knowledge of essentially anecdotal memories of customary law, inheritance rights, taboos, and rituals, and that the distinction between IAK and Western European education was clear which forced his students to "…find a way to accommodate and make sense of both systems…"; (2) warns that the acknowledgment of IAK "… does not necessarily imply there is internal consensus or that everybody who belongs to the culture shares the same knowledge base for decision making; and last, he informs us that (3) that although some reforms have occurred in primary school curriculums to incorporate IAK (e.g., Kneya), they are still "…beset by undue reliance on facts, rote memorization and regurgitation" (Semali 1999:309-311-312).

Hence, in critical fashion, Semali delineates the obstacles to the implementation of IAK as: (1) a lack of political will to correct the contradictions of intent and practice which set unrealistic national goals, (2) dependence of foreign fiscal planning, (3) inappropriate macro planning, (4) inappropriate research methods, (5) a lack of formal African school teaching methodology, (6) the difficulty of obtaining donor support for research in indigenous education, (7) the alienation of many African intellectuals from their culture, and (8) negative attitudes towards the legacy of colonial education (Semali 1999: 309, 311-312). Semal's critique is instructive, and thus effectively highlights his call for people in Africa to "…rethink education and schooling and begin a new path which departs from foreign interpretations of what is important at the local level." And more importantly, his questions about: how much control do African people have over the production of their identity, what extent do they consciously and knowingly continue to be ignored, and how to set African education theory ablaze in search of a pedagogy of excellence (Semali 1999: 313, 316-317).

The No Language or Literature Myth

In regards to language and literature in indigenous Africa, John Henrik Clarke in his introduction to John G. Jackson's book *Introductions to African Civilizations* (1970) set the tone for discourse. He forthrightly says, "Contrary to a misconception which still prevails, the Africans were familiar with literature and art for many years before their contract with the Western world". Clarke's position is correct, however the fallacy remain present.

For example, Ayittey (1991:30) in his essentially decent work on indigenous African institutions says "without any written literature, the natives of African relied upon oracles, proverbs, storytelling and music to educate and inculcate…"

One would think that although much of African history centered on oral tradition, a written script would be in Africa somewhere, but following Ayittey's assessments, discourse about an African source of writing is a mute topic. But contrary to that notion, one of the earliest written African language was Ge'ez, also known as Ethiopic, deriving from the liturgical language of the Ethiopian church with its inscriptions from the 3rd or 4th century before Arabic (according to biographies of Ibn Khallikan, Arabic was invented by an African named Abul Aswan) was introduced via Arab conquest in the 7th century (*The New Encyclopedia Britannica*: 1997:162).

And furthermore, in West Africa, Winters (1991) informs us that the Mande invented several scripts that were used throughout the western Sahara to: (1) meet the demands of long distances trade, (2) allow merchants a way to keep records of their business transactions, (3) preserve religious doctrine, and serve as (4) a method to record obituaries. Hence, the oldest inscriptions are dated at 3,000 BC with a proto-Mande syllabic script of approximately 200-300 signs and 40 different forms; and thus current evidence of the script can be found in Mauritania and Morocco (Winters 1991: 208-211).

Historically, there were many scripts in Africa. For example, the scripts of ancient Egypt hieroglyphic; hieratic and demotic; the Meroitic and Coptic scripts of Nubia; the Amharic, Sabean and Ge'ez scripts of Ethiopia; the Berber and Carthaginian scripts of North Africa; the Arabic script of North, Northeastern and west Africa; the Swahili Perso-Arabic script of the east coast of Africa; the Nsibidi script of the Efik of Nigeria; the Mende script of Mali and Sierra Leone; the Moum script of the Moum of Cameroon; the Toma (aka Loma) and Vai scripts of Liberia; the Bete script of the Bete of Ivory Coast, the Akan script, and the A-ka-u-ku script invented by the Bamum around 1896 in Cameroon that only a few as three people can read [in 2004 the archive was only used by a traditional healer who used the script as his only means of writing as he simultaneously consulted the books for ancient Bamum medicinal remedies] (Tedla 1995:134, Karenga 1993:75, Obenga 1972: chapter 10). Consequently, the history of African script need a full analysis and inclusion in the curriculum of contemporary Africa in juxtaposition to multi-ethnic African language study. Until this happens in Africa and around the world, the myth of Africa as a historically illiterate continent will not end.

Subsequently, we must begin to tell a different story that informs of when the demand and market for books were more profitable than any other form of business in Timbuktu and "…university life was fairly common and scholars were beheld with reverence" (Davidson 1959: 93; Clark 1970: 20). And also examine language more extensively as Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o (2000:156) reminds us, when he said:

One of the worst robberies is that language. In the realm of culture, African has been robbed of languages in the most literal and figurative sense so that even today Africa is still defining itself in terms of Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusaphone linguistic zones.

Science and Technology

In the arena of science and technology historically and presently, Africa is generally unrecognized or extremely discounted. This fact is most evident in a simple review of most college and university textbooks; the overwhelming majority do not mention Africa, except for an occasional reference to animal life (non-human), mineral sources, or plant life.

Consequently, the historical or contemporary African contribution (i.e., state of knowing or understanding) to the identification or investigation of natural phenomena (science), and technology is absent, although research have documented indigenous technology in Africa in many areas that include: manufacturing, agriculture, food processing, civil engineering, transportation, mining, and communication (Sunal, et al 1998:120)

Considering this quintessence, a quick review of the literature reveals that Africa had: (1) produced carbon steel 1,500 to 2000 years ago on the western shores of Lake Ukerewe (aka Lake Victoria) in Tanzania (Van Sertima 1991:9), (2) created a stone astronomical observatory in Kenya on the edge of the Lake of Turkana 300 years before the birth of Christ with each stone aligned with a star (ibid: 10), (3) via the Dogon of Mali plotted the orbits of stars circling Sirius and revealed the nature of its companion although it was invisible to the human eye to chart Sirius B, the smallest and heaviest star in the sky, representing a 700 year old tradition (Adams 1991:27-29), (4) developed medical text 5,000 years ago in ancient Egypt (Finch 1991:140), (5) developed iron technology no later that the middle of the fist millennium in West Africa (Sutton 1982:297), and has historically done a host of other work in the pure and applied sciences generally unknown to most in the world at one time or the other.

However, the contributions set by Africa and her people to history has seemingly remained absent in the consciousness of many, and subliminally fuel the myth that an indigenous scientific or technological community did not exists in traditional African societies.

And in compound fashion, historically, during the colonial era indigenous technology declined and in some places it was banned to entertain the importation of European manufactured products. Thus, the myth indigenous scientific or technological community backwardness was structurally perpetuated through mis-education, and social-political constraints.

Thus, today science education in Africa is struggling with dominating Western influences, almost killing any prospects for developing a curriculum relevant to African culture and the learner. For example, Ogunniyi (1998) in a study on malaria found that African scientist concern therein was with why some people and not others are afflicted with malaria, whereas the Western scientist searched for the causative agent in the disease. They both were working to prevent malaria in the future; however their cultural orientation to the investigation question reflected different cultural approaches. The Western concern was inanimate objects, while the African concern was for human welfare. This short example illustrates the complexity of the modern struggle of African science in its articulation of cultural ethos and scientific principles. To arrest this situation a detective approach may suffice according to Tedla in "…piecing together the continent's experiences…to obtain a fuller picture of traditional education and its teachings of the sciences of Africa (Tedla 1995:127)."

And therefore, a full investigation into the history of African science and science education in Africa is necessary to inform modern discourse which can encompass: (1) Chiekh Anta Diop's translation of a major portion Albert Einstein's theory of relativity into Wolof (Van Sertima 1986:8), (2) Ishango bone mathematical markings found at the fishing site on Lake Nyanza (aka Lake Edward) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 9000 BC and 6500 BC (Zaslavsky 1991:111), (3) the African roots of fractal geometry (Eglash 1999, Frost 1999), and (4) the metal workers of Ife who mastered the lost-wax casting, smithing, and chasing techniques to produce copper and copper-based alloy by the second quarter of the second millennium AD (Connah 1987: 141).

Critical African Education Theory

Currently, there are many challenges facing education in Africa: lack of funds, teachers, classrooms, learning materials, and transparency. Considering this challenge, contemporary African education need a critical examination of its mission, goals and objectives that moves beyond the questions of select donor agencies and narrow national issues. Hence, an African centered critical theory is needed to extract the best of indigenous African thought and practice to present research-based alternatives and solutions to current educational challenges in Africa.

Instructive in this vain is Brock-Utne (2000) in her response to the World Bank "Education for All" conference held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1900 which presented some insights concerning what may be the beginning of a critical theory of African education via her thesis that: (1) there is an intellectual re-colonization present among many African nations south of the Sahara, (2) not only has Africa become dependent upon Western aid, but also on Western curricula, culture and languages, (3) Western donors and part of the Western educated African elite are involved in a re-colonization process that benefits themselves to the detriment of the African masses, and therefore (4) all of the above robs the people of Africa of their indigenous knowledge and language, starves African higher education, and subsequently perpetuates Western domination (Brock-Utne 2000: p.xxii, back cover). And in addition, current discourse on African education in and outside of Africa report that it is in a perpetual state of crisis. Whether this is true or false is debatable, yet no critical theory of African education has appeared to analyze the 'crisis'. Consequently internal and external educators, policy makers, donors and others are lost in a web of slack reforms that fail to educate the overwhelming majority in Africa. This omission is indeed intriguing given that before and after colonialism, formal education has generally been an elitist enterprise.

Accordingly, at least four preliminary questions arise germane to a theoretical development of critical African education (CAE), i.e.: (1) how should it be defined, (2) how can it be infused with current discourse/study on African education, (3) what are the implications of CAE for social policy in Africa, and (4) why is it important/relevant to the continuance of African education and schooling?

As a starting point, we can examine a construct introduced by Horton (2000) on critical demography that conceptually apply to critical African education (CAE) theory that can: (1) institute the development and application of ideas, theories and methods that fit the African ethos; (2) articulate the manner in which domestic and international social, economic and political structures differentiates, dominate and subordinate African education, (3); call for a more explicit discussion and examination of the nature of power and how it perpetuates oppressive educational and social structures; (4) institute a systematic approach to discourse concerning African education; (5) develop, articulate and research situations that can meet the requirements of a wide variety of circumstances, principles, and procedures; (6) explain the nature or behavior of select phenomena and its historical and contemporary sophistication, and (7) last, how it may function as a reflective, descriptive, explanatory, and predicative theory that can effectively challenge the status quo.

The utility of the CAE paradigm obviously depends on the intellectual/academic community and a general recognition that it can become a useful approach in: (1) the study of AE when the history and contemporary advances in African education are ignored (e.g., ancient Egypt, Mali, University of Sankore…), (2) attempts to arrest elite privilege, (3) examining pedagogical structural changes, (4) exploring future prospects for African education, and (5) in examining possibilities for new research modules. Thus, more attention must be given to the question of critical African education theory in hope that it will transcend eloquent rhetoric to become an agent for progressive policy formation. In this way, we can apply the insights of Kwame Nkrumah (1968: 30) that call for us to be:

Equipped with a clear knowledge of our objectives, we are in a position to undertake a critical appraisal of recent developments in African history. [because] *This is necessary if we are to draw positive lessons from past experience to determine both the area of deviation and the need for correction, and to devise a more effective strategy for the future.*

Discussion

The days of ignoring the African contribution to knowledge and education should be past; however it is a common practice. For example in a study to generate curriculum recommendations that were multinational in origin, perspective and responsive to the reality of the interconnected positions of human existence, Africa was absent among a nine nation multinational 182 member panel from an array of professions. The task of the panel was to reach a consensus on (1) complex global crises that humans will face in the next 25 years, (2) human characteristics needed for dealing with these crises, and (3) education strategies needed for developing the human characteristics needed to deal with the crises, yet Africa was absent (Parker 1999: 117, 137).

Surely African views, issues and knowledge could have contributed to the above issues, but the African voice was ignored, and ironically, the researchers acknowledged the absence as one of the limitations of their study. This oversight (and general lack of respect), and other education-centered activities that exclude Africa should be aggressively addressed at international education associations meetings by progressive scholar-activist. And most interesting, there seems to be a subliminal lack of respect for African education and knowledge throughout pedagogical discourse.

For example, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (2003: 1-2; 77-82) in its 'History of Education' section list Egypt as an early civilization in constructing formal education in three short paragraphs, however there is no mention of Egypt in the discussion of education in Africa (supporting the idea that Egypt ancient and modern is separate from the continent and culture), and within six pages there is no discussion on African education trends or theories, but rather a review of African responses to oppressive Euro-centric colonial education policy.

This wholesale apartheid historiography of African education should spark a Pan African corrective pronouncement and thus advance a new agenda with a prerequisite of justice, cultural integrity and social responsibility. And anything short of that will be a throwback to the days of colonial manipulation when education was an instrument of imperialist domination and economic exploration, revealing itself as a key culprit in contemporary African economic and political instability that acquit responsibility for inequality, social stratification, and intellectual-cultural servitude.

Nevertheless, Ayittey (1991) and others (Marah 1989, 1987) have done some preliminary research on indigenous African institutions and social structure through an analysis of traditional African religion and philosophy (before and after European conquest) via data on court procedures, participatory democracy, government by consensus, indigenous economic systems, hence guiding research to a systematically organize set of elements to create a theoretical construct, and an efficient educational enterprise applicable to the current and future needs of Africa.

Moreover, in building a 'theoretical construct', African education policy makers need to consider at least four suggestions. First, they should investigate a theory of Africa education that moves beyond problematic analysis to a constructive critique of internal and external forces that impede progressive social change. Second, there should be a research methodology that will continuously include a study of how indigenous knowledge, education and learning techniques can inform modern social, economic and political reality. Third, the proposed new curriculum (or theoretical formation) should be instituted in Africa to maximize human resource potential to advance national and international development, and last, African policy makers should decide to create and sustain an independent think tank to address common educational and social issues throughout the continent.

And should anyone doubt the need for new 'theoretical construct' or critical theory of African education, they should consult ongoing research that tells us: (1) African primary school enrollment and literacy rates are among the lowest in the world; (2) 42 million school children south of the Sahara are not enrolled in school and of those that do have access to school, their schooling was often of such poor quality that they are not able to acquire even the most basic skills of reading and writing, and that (3), many children south of the Sahara lose their teachers to AIDS, compounding the search for educational opportunity (860,000 in 1999 according to USAID).

The complexity of the challenges to education in Africa call for a skilled body to step forward, and in addition to the intellectual community, the political community must also fashion solutions, thus the birth of the African Union (AU) in 2002 demonstrates a political will to move beyond post-independence rhetoric to the establishment of a governing body in the form of a Pan-African Parliament, and an overall AU goal to accelerate the process of integration in Africa to enable it play its rightful role in the global economy while addressing multifaceted social, economic and political problems via its economic development programs like the celebrated New Partnership for Africa's Development vision and strategic framework for Africa's renewal adopted in 2001 by five African heads of state (Algeria, Egypt, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa) via the Organization of African Unity to develop an integrated social-economic development plan for Africa. And secondly, South Africa President Thabo Mbeki's conceptualized African Renaissance which call for African people and nations to solve the problems of Africa in the context of social cohesion, democracy, economic development/growth to place the continent as a significant player in geo-political affairs is another step in the rights, and thus warrant our collective support.

In short, this critical Pan African initiative will bring the continent together, and consequently, aid critical African education theory allow for the advancement and incorporation of the African world community in the process as demonstrated in philosophical-political approach of Mbeki through the African Renaissance movement designed to end the violence, elitism, corruption and poverty and simultaneously promote a more just and equitable order grounded in encouraging progressive education and learning processes and the reversal of the 'brain drain' of the African intellect, juxtaposing self-determination discourse focused upon heritage and ideals. Thus, unlike any other time in history, now is the time for Africa and her international community to embrace and implement a Pan African social-educational theory and practice that will advance a corrective critique of education and knowledge production in Africa.

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