

Thoughts on a Cross-National Program

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SINCE 1961 the Education Development Center (formerly Educational Services Incorporated) has been administering an African Education Program (AEP). The principal obvious products of this program have been curriculum materials in mathematics and science for schools in sub-Saharan English-speaking Africa.

However, while a major component of the projects is the production of relevant materials for Africans by Africans with U.S. assistance, the entire effort is underscored by our aim to support and contribute to the climate for change in African education. We have sought to aid the strengthening of the individual and institutional capability for continuing curriculum development in Africa while at the same time we are assisting in the creation of new educational materials.

Individuals from the following 17 countries have participated in some aspect of the overall program: Botswana, Canada, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, the United Kingdom, the United States, West Indies, and Zambia.

Those of us who have taken part in the program have gained at least as much as we have given. The gains are other than those of personal satisfaction. There is the professional growth realized from working with educators from many nations on a common project of curriculum development. The insights gained and shared through this cooperation have been manifested in materials

prepared by individuals for use outside the scope of the projects for their respective national systems whether this be in Nigeria, the United States, the West Indies, or the United Kingdom. In some instances, major U.S. curriculum development projects have been substantially assisted or even initiated through contacts and experiences generated by the African Education Program.

While the AEP is essentially a U.S. program of technical assistance to African nations, there has been a significant involvement of British educators. From the very early stages of the program British educators have assisted our efforts, participated in program conferences, and served as program staff. One item worth particular mention is the close cooperation existing between the AEP and the British organization, the Centre for Curriculum Renewal and Educational Development Overseas (CREDO).

The AEP began when for six weeks during the summer of 1961 African, American, and British educators and scholars met to consider African educational needs and resources in the light of some of the new American curriculum reform projects. There was little or no disposition to believe that the products of U.S. educational projects were items suitable for direct export to Africa. There was, however, optimism that the philosophy

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and techniques inherent in the U.S. experience might be relevant to the needs of the less developed countries. At the heart of this experience is the uniting of university scholars with educators from all levels in the development and trial of the materials.

Another point of optimism was held by the convenors of and participants in the conference. They believed that effective programs of curriculum development could be organized on a multi-national basis. They recognized that for a multi-national program of this sort to be productive it was necessary to build on strong national institutions and commitment. In the past eight years the basic premises upon which the initial conference was organized have been amply justified.

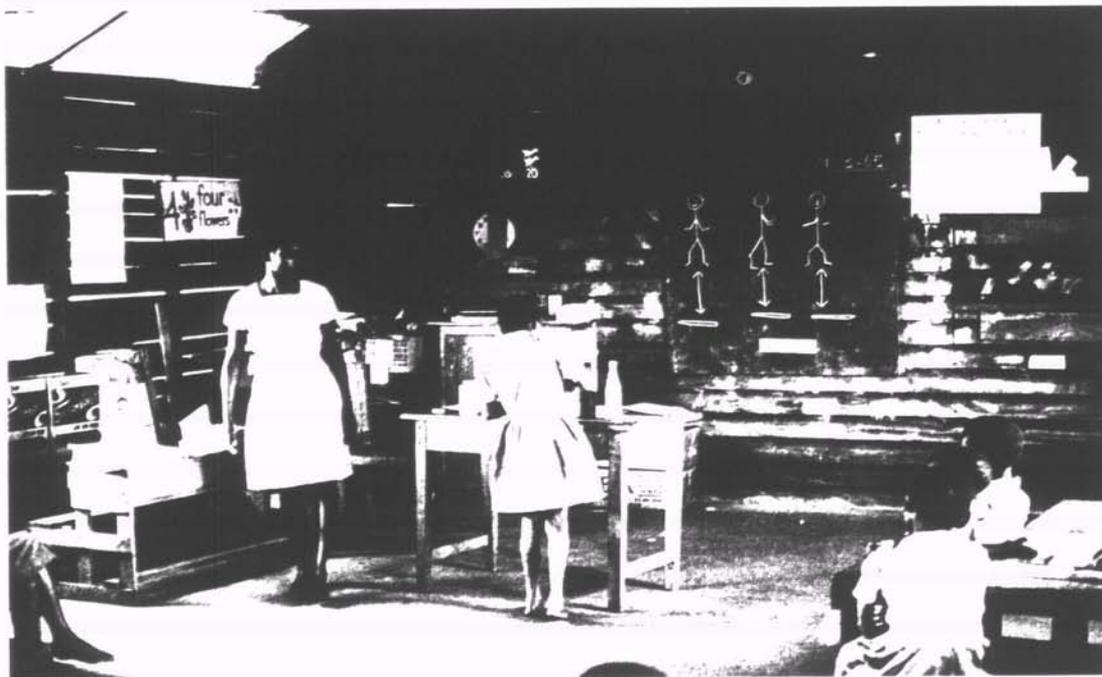
Based on this summer conference, the African Mathematics Program (AMP) was organized in 1961 and the African Primary Science Program (APSP) got under way in 1965. Space is not available here to provide a detailed account of the organization and

accomplishments of the two programs. Readers who are interested in this information may wish to write to EDC for the 1968 Annual Report and project statement distributed directly by the AMP and the APSP.

Different Models

The two programs represent two different models of cross-national curriculum development efforts. The different subject matter, involvement of new professionals, and the experience of the Math Program contributed to the variations found in the science program.

One major difference occurs in that the AMP emphasizes the preparation of materials at summer writing workshops, while the APSP has developed a greater dependence on program staff members loaned to African institutions on a year-round basis. Workshops were used in the initial stages of the science program to produce an inventory of



Programs emphasize use of guides and materials.
Photographs courtesy of the author

materials for modification and trial in the individual countries. The science educators, however, are posted to facilitate the local development and adaptation of materials.

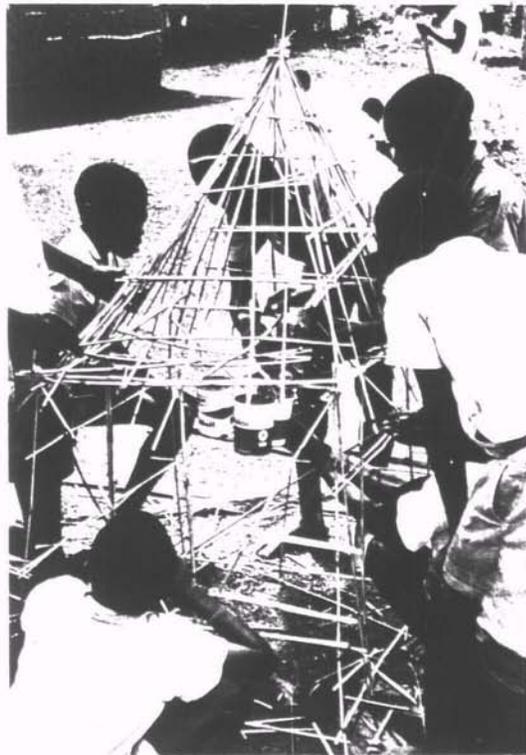
Each member of the staff who is loaned to Africa works closely with at least one science educator of the host country based at the same African institution. The dialogue which develops from this counterpart situation is built on an exchange of professional experience and insights. In addition, the expatriate experience is more readily usable when modified by the cultural filter of one's colleagues.

Another significant point of difference lies with the range and order of the materials produced by the two projects. The math program has produced a sequential curriculum beginning with primary one and continuing through advanced mathematics. The APSP, on the other hand, is developing a number of discrete science units for the primary school. Supplementary science readers also are being produced for use both in and out of class.

Both programs have given special emphasis to the development of teacher's guides and training materials including classroom films and audio tapes. Training programs have been conducted both to explore the effectiveness of these materials and to develop cadres of teachers for the trial programs.

These trial programs have sought the close involvement of Africans in the design of the program, the preparation of the materials, and the direction of the program. This is an aspect of technical assistance, however, which requires greater attention. The motives and assumptions of expatriates in a program can and do color the operations of a program. Decision making by Westerners, no matter how well intended or altruistic, lacks the necessary cultural insights. As simple as that may sound and as subtle as the effects may seem, it is an extremely important consideration, given the long-term goals of technical assistance.

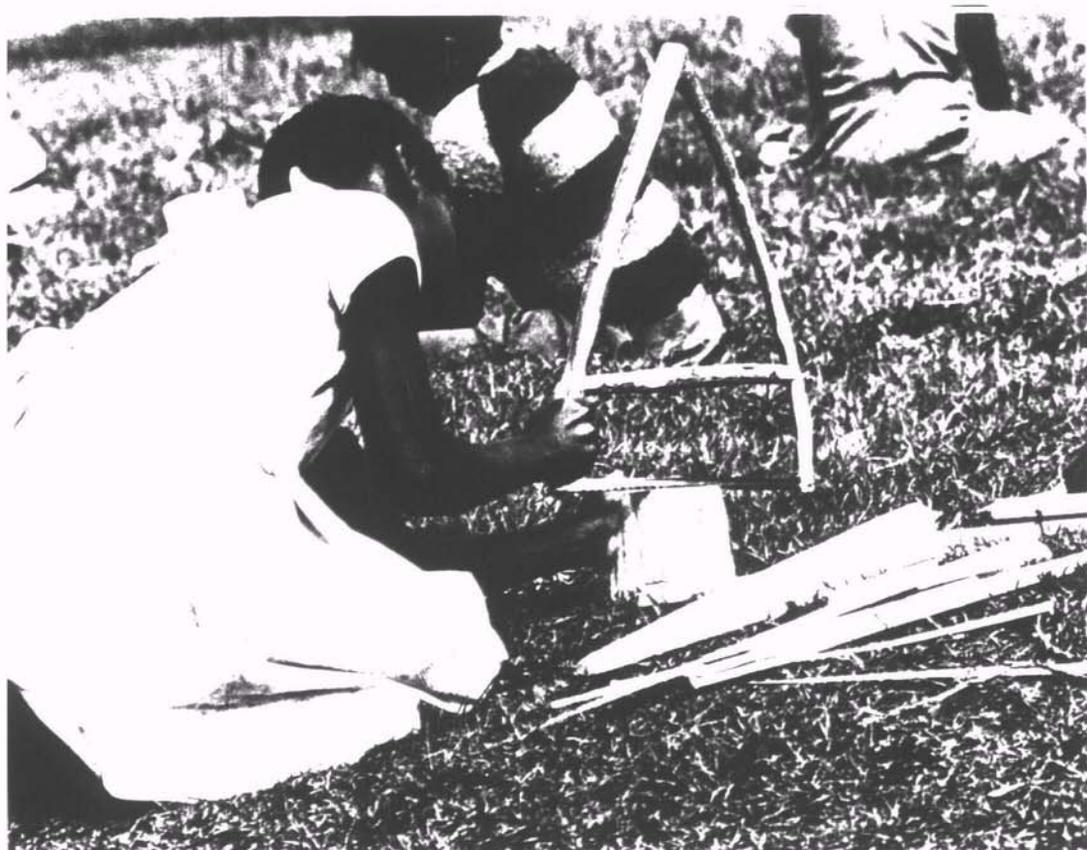
Only with the deep involvement of Africans can the needs and priorities of African education and its place in development be adequately interpreted. What is needed is a true partnership between the aid donor and



Pupils test for strength in a grass structure.

the aid recipient. The sharing of relevant professional experience is already the basis for much of our program activity. However, we should also effectively share, with Africans in African institutions, the critical, frequently daily, decision making on matters of program substance and administration. Otherwise, our technical assistance programs lie in jeopardy of continually being viewed in a literal sense as "foreign" aid. As such, our programs will fail to be identified as truly African and will lack the necessary African commitment to ensure the long term success of our efforts.

These concerns, which have been part of the African Education Program from its beginning, are addressed directly as the result of African initiatives taken at and subsequent to the Conference of African Educators, EDC, and CREDO on Social Studies which was held at Mombasa, Kenya, in August 1968. There are many interesting points relating to that



Working with wood assists development in the early years.

conference, such as the fact that it was held at all, the focus on primary school, and the joint sponsorship. As tempting as it would be to discuss these, we will again refer to other materials for substantive details.

From Ideas to Action

Details covering the discussions and conclusions can be found in the report of the conference, issued by EDC or CREDO. Additional views of the proceedings can be found in "The Mombasa Conference: A New Look for the Social Studies in Africa?" an unpublished manuscript by Vincent R. Rogers of the University of Connecticut.

The following excerpt from page 15 of the conference report makes the desired point concisely:

It is in the nature of social studies that each country must be entirely responsible for its own programme of development. So, if development is to take place it must take place country by country in ways and at times deemed proper by the ministries of education, institutes, and other organizations concerned with change in the school programme. But this does not rule out mutual assistance among African countries.

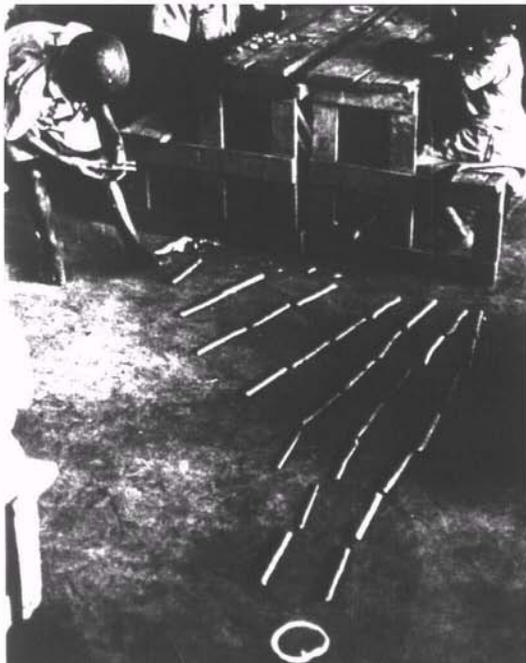
Reference to the recommendations of the various groups will show that there is considerable scope for African countries to assist one another, in particular, by exchanging information among themselves, by organising conferences and workshops, perhaps on a regional basis, and by making it possible for individuals to visit other countries to observe experimental work in action. The conference believed that many African countries would welcome such opportunities of working together.

Who then is to take responsibility for providing the machinery for mutual assistance? The ideal answer is a coordinating committee of African educators possessing the necessary knowledge and experience to initiate action of various kinds. . . .

With this idea before the conference, participants decided that they would not take definitive action prior to consulting with the various ministries and institutions which would have to be involved. Rather, an African Exploratory Committee was formed to investigate what, if any, action to take.

This group has now met twice since the conference. It first met in January in Nairobi, Kenya. The members present had counseled with their respective ministries and other relevant institutions and, based on their contacts, they voted to reconstitute themselves as the Coordinating Committee outlined in the conference report. The members of the new committee are from Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

More recently the committee met in



Water represents an important element in practical experiments.

Kampala, Uganda, to decide on a site for the establishment of a materials clearinghouse to serve as the operating arm of the committee and their African Social Studies Program. At that time they also prepared the initial draft of a five-year program and developed a proposal for funding. Advertisements have been placed for an Executive Secretary and at this writing several applications have been received.

Beyond these developments, contact has come from the program committees of both the Math and Science Programs regarding how each of the three projects might best relate to and support the others' efforts to reform the curriculum of the African schools. It is certainly early to make predictions about where these efforts may lead and what they may accomplish. On the other hand, there is little question as to the exciting potential which exists, even on this small stage, for fostering continuing curriculum development.

There are many unanswered questions about programs of educational aid in both the



Children use materials in solving a number problem.

international and domestic spheres. As Theodore Geiger has written in his book, *The Conflicted Relationship: The West and the Transformation of Asia, Africa and Latin America*:

The major current need of the U.S. foreign-aid program is a more adequate research effort directed toward improved understanding of the sociocultural factors operating in . . . Africa . . . and designed to be of practical use to the United States and recipient countries in the planning and execution of programs and projects.

There is little question that if this research effort is needed at all it is essential with respect to aid in the field of education. Indeed, it seems almost trite to comment that we need a far better understanding of the role of education, both in the transformation of traditional societies and in continuing the orderly development of the more technologically advanced nations. Trite though it may be, there is nevertheless nowhere near the necessary level of research being funded.

An assessment, or a research investigation, needs to be done on the sort of program that we have been engaged in under the AEP. To some extent it might be best built into the initial phases of a program. In any event, it should be started now on existing programs and followed up at approximately five-year intervals for some period beyond the termination of a program. Obviously the actual length of the study would be determined by the program being investigated and research data being sought.

The insights achieved from such sociocultural studies may be as significant for the more developed as for the less developed countries. Clearly, the value of such research will manifest itself long before a final report is published. The rate of cultural and technological change throughout our world is bewildering and traumatic. Research which will contribute a better understanding to the complex processes of sociocultural change and the role that education plays in those processes is vital. □

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