

**The Schoolyard Gate:
Schooling and Childhood in Global Perspective**

Version 2

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Deux et deux quatre
quatre et quatre huit
huit et huit font seize
Répétez! dit le maître.
Deux et deux quatre
quatre et quatre huit
huit et huit font seize.
Mais voilà l'oiseau-lyre
qui passe dans le ciel
l'enfant le voit
l'enfant l'entend
l'enfant l'appelle:
Sauve-moi
joue avec moi
oiseau! ...

Jacques Prévert, *Paroles*, Paris : Gallimard,
1972

Notebook Leaf

Two and two are four
four and four eight
eight and eight make sixteen. . .
Repeat! says the teacher
Two and two are four
four and four eight
eight and eight make sixteen.
But there goes the lyre-bird
passing through the sky
the child sees him
the child calls him:
Save me
play with me
bird! ...

Translated by William E. Baker,
<http://projects.ups.edu/engl/fa2000/203c/etreakle/prevert.htm>

1. Introduction¹

My ultimate task here is to ask how schooling as a global phenomenon affects the experiences of children around the world and the cultural construction of childhood. But before I can suggest directions for research on those questions, I must ask whether or in what sense schooling is in fact a global phenomenon. Just as it is inaccurate to conceive of global cognitive effects of “literacy” because literacy is not a single thing in lived experience, so it would be inaccurate to think of schooling as having a single effect on children because it represents different lived experiences, warns Elsie Rockwell (1999).

¹ Research in Guinea that influenced my thinking about these questions was generously funded by the Spencer Foundation. Earlier research in France was supported by the University of Michigan, NSF, and NIMH.

Still, Rockwell acknowledges patterns or “grammars of schooling” that have persisted over the long term across wide regions. It is the first task of this essay to determine whether we can now discern a particular grammar of schooling that encompasses the whole world. Since I am an ethnographer, let me begin with some concrete images.

In France, a low fence often surrounds urban elementary and pre-elementary schools, and parents turn over their children to teachers at the schoolyard gate. The fence, although not the high chain-link affair that one sees at some urban U.S. schools, functions symbolically to separate the children’s lives in school from their lives at home and in the neighborhood.² I begin with a question about the schoolyard gate as a way to begin a reflection on what schooling means for children and for childhood. The question is, is the gate keeping children in or keeping children out?

1.1 Wanting Out

In a brilliant synthesis of anthropological theory on formal schooling, John D’Amato (1993) begins from the premise that, all else being equal, children do not want to be in school. He cites examples of children challenging teachers’ authority from North America, Europe, and Japan to support his case. A primary reason is that “school is compulsory and otherwise constraining” (1993:188).³ Indeed, at least six years of schooling are now compulsory in most nations of the world.⁴ Tom Sawyer eluding the classroom to sneak off to an island in the Mississippi is one image that comes to mind.

² An image to think about later, perhaps: the book bag or cartable that children carry back and forth between home and school (and which is subject to search by metal detector in some U.S. schools).

³D’Amato also cites two other reasons that students resist school: “instructional interaction is contentious” and therefore unpleasant because it requires students to compete in publicly evaluated displays of knowledge, and students are taught in groups, so that resistance tends to become a group norm.

⁴ By 1990, even in the least schooled part of the world, sub-Saharan Africa, nearly 60 percent of countries had passed a compulsory school law (Boli & Ramirez 1992). Countries with compulsory school laws demand between 6 and 10 years of schooling with little variation from one region of the world to another (National Center for Educational Statistics 2000, Table 394).

Another metaphorical image to conjure in your mind is one of schoolchildren clinging to the schoolyard gate (or gazing out the classroom window, as in Prévert's poem above), longing to be free.

Now, continues D'Amato, "if children nonetheless comply with school, then the perceived benefits of school must in some way outweigh the costs" (1993:189). The benefits may be extrinsic, intrinsic, or both. On the extrinsic side, D'Amato notes that most middle-class children as well as working-class children of immigrants recognize that school brings "external rewards for compliance and sanctions for resistance," specifically, that school achievement will probably lead to a decent job and reasonably high social status for them as adults. In contrast, he argues, elaborating on John Ogbu's theory (e.g., Ogbu 1978; Ogbu & Simon 1998), "caste-like" or "involuntary" minorities, lower-class children, and children in the low-achieving classes in any school cannot count on extrinsic rewards. Notably, African American and Native American students tend to believe, with some justification, that school achievement will not necessarily pay off for them because of job ceilings (D'Amato 1993: 191).⁵ On the side of intrinsic rewards, children may choose to comply with school when they find it "an intrinsically enjoyable process" by virtue of a positive relationship with teacher or peers, a sense of mastery and accomplishment, or (although not mentioned by D'Amato) the joy of learning (1993: 191).⁶ If schooling neither promises extrinsic rewards nor offers

⁵ School is perceived not to be worth the pain of complying because of discrimination and job ceilings. Recent evidence of the persistence of job ceilings comes from Bertrand & Mullainathan (2003). Ogbu's theory has been challenged in the case of gender (Mickelson 1989) and in the case of some European countries (Gibson 1998).

⁶ The value of culturally relevant pedagogy, in this context, is that it increases intrinsic rewards by according more respect to students and makes the classroom more appealing.

immediate intrinsic rewards, students will resist schooling to the core and will flee it as soon as they can.

1.2 Wanting In

With those thoughts in mind, I went to do fieldwork in the Republic of Guinea. To my naïve eye, schools there seemed even less inviting than D'Amato portrayed them. Benches were hard and crowded, classrooms were hot if not stifling, almost all teachers indulged in corporal punishment to greater or lesser degree. Indeed, whereas U.S. teachers often talked about making learning “fun,” in Guinea I was told, “*Il faut souffrir pour apprendre*” (to learn one must suffer).

Thus my fascination when, on making a first visit to a school in downtown Conakry, I found the school gate and witnessed a schoolboy—a boy about the age of Tom Sawyer—clinging to the *outside* of the gate, begging to be let in. The director had punished this student for some offence by banishing him from school for the day. A burly man with a “whip”⁷ stood at the gate, keeping the boy from entering. Then I recalled that my colleague Ntal Alimasi had explained to me about his own childhood in Zaïre that students wanted to be in school and certainly preferred school to being home, where they might have to do chores. That is why the big punishment is to be “*bâni*” (banished), turned away from school.⁸

One can also find a similar disjuncture in views of schooling between North and South in the research literature. At least since the days when functionalism lost favor, much educational literature in Europe and North America casts schooling as a repressive

⁷ A strip of rubber from an old tire.

⁸ [However, EcDn had no afternoon recess for its afternoon session because many children would have gone home and not come back.]

arm of the state. However, you will rarely find an African intellectual making such an argument, and scholars in Latin America have pointed out that the most repressive regimes there had dismembered, not embraced, state schools, while local populations were appropriating rather than resisting schools (Rockwell 1998). In Mexico, for example, public schools can be seen as a liberating force that offered a relatively equalizing experience to the nation's children in the context of strong gender, class, and ethnic distinctions outside of school, at least for those children who managed to get in and stay in school (Rockwell 1998). In Guinea, where primary schooling still reaches only about half the country's children, parents mobilize to build schools in the hope of enticing the state to send a teacher to their village. I saw parents petitioning a school director to ignore the official limit of 50 children in a first grade and let their child enroll.

2. Overview and Definitions

Here are two contrasting images of schools, then: Children clinging to the gate wanting *out* in the global North, children clinging to the gate wanting *in* in the global South. The contrast implies that schooling does not mean the same thing everywhere, nor do children experience it in the same way around the world. Indeed, I will argue that Ministries of Education, teachers, and parents appropriate schooling in ways that make the lived experience different from country to country and, in fact, from school to school. The biggest differences will be found when contrasting schools in the most and the least affluent countries.

Nonetheless. Nonetheless. I will also argue that schooling, in spite of the great variation in its embodiment in different places, really can be said to be a global phenomenon. I will make this argument first in a simple-minded way, by pointing out

how schooling has spread almost every corner of the earth. A quick tour of world culture theory (neo-institutionalism) will offer a non-functionalist explanation of why that spread took place. Then I will return to D'Amato's synthesis to argue that his argument may after all apply to schools in the South as well as the North. That argument will require us to consider functions of schooling, particularly the infamous sorting function.

Having better established what schooling is as a global phenomenon, I will then turn to two questions about which I can offer speculation more than a body of research. These are, first, how global schooling affects children's lived experiences; here I will argue that schooling has brought parallel kinds of sorting to all countries, assigning life chances to children based on childhood achievement. Second, I will ask how schooling affects the cultural construction of childhood; here I will argue that the particular way in which we do schooling at present leads us to categorize children by micro-age-grades and by newly defined individual traits like "maturity" and "intelligence."

2.1 Education and Schooling

From an anthropologist's perspective, "education" means much more than schooling. In its loosest sense, education means the entire learning experience of children or other novices, whether provided deliberately or more haphazardly within the culture (e.g., Mead 1928). In a narrower but still anthropological sense, education (or "formal education") means deliberate intervention meant to affect the learning experience of children or other novices through "formal, predictable, stereotypic learning experiences" (Cohen 1971 [2000]: 86). Formal education includes such practices as apprenticeship, initiation, and lectures, sermons and scolding as well as schooling (Henry 1960 [1976]). Schooling is formal education usually carried out in a place separated

from ordinary life and conducted by an expert “stranger” (in frequent contrast to initiation) (Cohen 1971 [2000]).

This essay concerns schooling. In particular, it concerns schooling of the current “Western” mode as opposed to older forms such as Mandarin examination-based education or Brahmin apprenticeships, or alternative contemporary forms such as Quranic schools (see Collins 2000). More specifically yet, this essay refers to primary schooling, the usually compulsory years of basic education in literacy and other foundational skills and knowledge, except where I make specific reference either to pre-elementary education or to secondary or postsecondary education.

2.2 “Globalization” and Global History

“Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole,” says Roland Robertson (1992:9). “Compression” refers to the acceleration in the 20th century of links among people around the world. Globalization is a word for the fact that one of my 45-year-old colleagues in Guinea liked to listen to Bob Dylan, Céline Dion, and Michael Jackson, while I like to listen to Orchestra Baobab. It is a word for the experience of hearing a child in an elementary school courtyard in a provincial town in Guinea singing the Macarena in 1998. Human beings have migrated and traded from the beginnings of evolution (Bentley 1993), but there is a sense [accurate?] that there has been a sharp recent increase in: the number of immigrants; the volume of traded goods and the distances of typical trades; the speed of communication (although it has been instantaneous between at least certain continents since the invention of the telegraph); the

speed of travel; and the volume of culture sharing--or perhaps the speed of culture sharing, because volume has always been high given enough time. [Appadurai 1997]

Robertson's reference to globalization as an intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole defines globalization as a mindset or ideology. I have seen it attributed to the experience of seeing photographs of the world taken from space, but surely this consciousness reaches further back. The notion that the "sun never sets on the British empire" evokes an image of the whole world at once. The pages of *Moby Dick* take the reader around the globe and illustrate the whole world personified on board the Pequod in the form of its international crew.

The sense of globalization as consciousness is related to the concept of globalization that I find most useful: world culture theory or neo-institutionalism.⁹ The world culture approach is a grand sociological theory about modern nation-states. Its theorists argue that a single global model of schooling has spread around the world as part of the diffusion of a more general cultural model of the modern nation-state, a model that also includes templates for organizing government, health systems, the military, and other institutions (Meyer et al. 1997).

Does "globalization" mean Westernization? Not always. Food, manufactured goods, and, importantly, popular culture (and "art"?) flow South to North as well as North to South (Hannerz 1987). However, the world culture as described by world culture theorists does have Western roots (Ramirez & Boli 1987); indeed, these theorists

⁹The label "world culture" comes from Ramirez, Soysal, and Shanahan (1997) and from the reference to a "rationalized world institutional and cultural order" in Meyer et al. (1997:151). Other authors refer to the ideas of John W. Meyer and his colleagues variously as "institutional theory" (Berkovitch 1999:7), "institutionalism" (Finnemore 1996; LeTendre et al. 2001), "neo-institutionalism" (Levin 2001), "global rationalization" (Davies & Guppy 1997), and, somewhat misleadingly, "world systems theory" (Cummins 1999).

see much of its foundation in “the distinctive culture of Western Christendom” (Meyer et al. 1997). However, “Western” is not synonymous with “North American.” Indeed, from the world culture perspective, international organizations have played a major role in diffusing world culture since the 1950s. Moreover, the West is hardly a monolith; it is rife with contradictions and competition (Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi 2001).

To say that there is a world culture—in this case, a set of learned norms and vocabulary and half-formed know-how—is not by any means to say that there is only one culture in the world. Rather, it is to say that in addition to all the national and ethnic and occupational and religious and other cultures in the world, humans have now invented a world culture that provides models and norms for certain parts of life: military systems, national governments, schooling, hospital systems. The world culture rubs elbows with, influences and is influenced by a myriad of other cultures.

3. Differences in Schooling around the World

Our first question, before we can ask about the global impact of schooling on children, is to ask whether schooling is globalized. There is no sense in asking about the effects of schooling on childhood worldwide if in fact there is no single experience of schooling around the globe.

First, the material conditions of schools North and South vary drastically. For example, every school in France and many individual classrooms in the United States have computers, whereas schools in the Republic of Guinea would be lucky to have as many as one book (of any kind, whether reader, math textbook, or storybook) per child. Schooling in Japan takes place in sturdy and functional buildings; in some parts of the world it takes place in a hot room under a leaking roof, or in no building at all.

Second, as we saw, children in the South tend to want in whereas children in the North, if D'Amato is right, tend to want out. This difference derives from other differences in the experience of childhood. Where would the children be when or if they were not in school? In the North, at least if Mark Twain is right, they would be swimming, roaming the wilderness, playing video games, or otherwise skylarking. In Guinea, as my colleague Alimasi hinted, unschooled girls would be selling products in the marketplace in the city or cultivating a field in a rural area; unschooled boys might be shining shoes in the city or shimmying up palm trees to collect palm oil nuts in the countryside. In other parts of the South, children work in manufacturing, care for their siblings, or otherwise contribute in cash or non-cash labor to the family economy. Schooling in the South, then, can be seen as liberating in two different ways. It “liberates” children’s minds from the “bonds” of illiteracy—or, less cynically, it really does open up a global network of ideas to students by training them in a world language and by providing at least hints about how to learn more. But schooling also liberates them, at least for the hours spent on its benches, from physical labor.

Beyond these gross differences, which are rooted partly in the difference between affluence and poverty, schools differ because of national cultural differences. For example, student-teacher ratios differ between Japan and the United States not for financial reasons, but because of underlying differences in pedagogical philosophy (Tobin, Davidson, & Wu 1989). The language of instruction may be a child’s home language, another language spoken in the community, a national language unfamiliar to some or all of the children when they enter school, or a completely alien world language like English or French. As Robin Alexander has lovingly documented, national traditions

influence teachers' philosophies and thus the shape and flow of a "lesson" (2000, 2002; see also Givvin et al. 2003).

Moreover, at the local level teachers and parents and children themselves may appropriate the forms and activities of schooling to suit local meanings, as in Pulap (Flinn 1992) or in rural Mexico of the 1920s and 1930s (Rockwell 1996). Indeed, national and local cultures are so powerful that many ethnographers would argue that schools are not really alike at all around the world, whatever superficial parallels one may find in their official organization or official curricula (see the chapters in Anderson-Levitt 2003). There are also differences from one school to another in the same country, from one classroom to another within the same school, and even from one class to another holding the teacher constant (Anderson-Levitt 2002:32-33).

4. Parallels

However, in spite of the rich variation on the ground, we would be unwise to ignore what is similar about schooling around the world.

4.1 Schooling Is Everywhere

To begin, there is the astonishing fact that schools are everywhere now. That is, Western-style schools have spread throughout the world (Boli, Ramirez & Meyer 1986 [1983]; Ramirez & Boli 1987), co-existing with other systems of formal education such as Quranic schools and displacing alternative school systems such as those that existed in China and Japan (Collins 2000). The world is approaching "universal" participation in primary schools. By 1870, the core developed countries had almost achieved universal mass education; mass educational systems appeared elsewhere at a steady rate before

World War II and sharply increased after 1950 (Meyer, Ramirez, & Soysal 1992). By the late 1990s, 87.6 percent of the children of the relevant age group were attending primary school (UNDP 2000: 197). Virtually 100 percent of children of the appropriate age range attend primary school in Canada, Sweden, the United States, and other nations of the North. Of course, just because most countries demand 6 to 10 years of schooling does not mean that all children comply. The rate of school attendance is only 60.4 percent in the least developed countries, and as low as 24 percent in Niger, 19 percent in Haiti, and 13 percent in Bhutan (UNDP 2000: 197).¹⁰

Even secondary schools have become systems of “mass” instruction in the world and of “universal” instruction in the North. Postsecondary education is also becoming a “mass” system in the North. (Martin Trow, 1974 defines “universal” participation as over 50%, “mass” participation as 15-50%, “elite” as under 15%).

Granted, not all children spend the same amount of time in school. Some of us spend 20-30 years, some only a year or two or even a few months. Some scholars argue that “a minimum of six years of primary schooling is necessary” in order “to ensure irreversible adult literacy” (Brossard & Yattara 2003:21). But shorter exposure to school must have other impacts. I will ask below what they might be.

4.2 Schools Share Certain Forms Worldwide at the Moment

Moreover, as world culture theorist argue, the schooling that has spread all over the world takes the same form up to a point (Anderson-Levitt 2003). Schools are

¹⁰ I should note that where there is less than 100 percent participation, gender patterns vary. Whereas girls have a better chance than boys to attend school in certain countries of Latin American and Africa, in the least developed countries as a whole they average only 80 percent a boy’s chance of going to school (UNDP 2000: 256-258). I have not yet found data, if indeed they exist, on how many years children actually spend in school in various parts of the world. Among children who attend, the minimum is probably only a few months—but even a few months may have some impact.

compulsory, mass, co-educational institutions ostensibly designed to encourage economic growth, development of the nation and, sometimes, development of the individual student. School systems tend to be administered by national ministries of education, although the United States is an exception. The outlines of a common global elementary curriculum can be discerned (Benavot et al. 1992). Schools tend to consist of age-graded “egg-carton” classrooms (one teacher per group of 15-100 students), and whole-class lecture and recitation paired with seatwork tends to dominate (LeTendre et al. 2001). Some see even more convergence—for example, on a 6-year elementary, 3-year middle school, and 3-year secondary pattern, or on the ideal of child as active learner (Meyer & Ramirez 2000).

4.3 Schooling Everywhere Is a Mechanism for Sorting Children

The Western form of schooling discussed here came to function as the key credentialing system in Germany beginning in the 18th century, then in the United States and Japan in the 19th and early 20th century, and in the rest of the world by the mid-20th century. Schools became the mechanism—or at least the officially recognized mechanism—for social reproduction and social mobility (“success”). I qualify my claim, as you see, by noting that school achievement has become the officially recognized mechanism for maintaining or acquiring social status. Demographic studies make it perfectly clear that academic achievement correlates with race and social class of origin. Hence, children still tend to inherit their parents’ social statuses. It is nonetheless true that the children of the elite now have to inherit via the mechanism of academic selection, or at least appear to do so. (President Bush, in spite of his parentage, had to pass through Yale.) It is also true that the introduction of school achievement as the mechanism of

status achievement does open the door to occasional mobility by someone from low social status (as in the case of President Clinton).

As the Western system of schooling has spread into the rest of the world, academic achievement as defined within that system has supplanted or is supplanting other systems for reproducing social statuses. In state societies in the past, social status might have been inherited directly from parents, who passed on wealth or a hereditary right to exercise power or access to an occupation that held a certain status. Some societies provided a mechanism for mobility by competition in a realm such as entrepreneurship (as in the United States even, to a limited extent, today) or through the military. Many societies relied on their own educational systems to train and sometimes actually to identify their ruling classes: “The Indian Brahman caste, the Confucian scholar-bureaucrat, and the Roman lawyer/speechmaker were all products of their own educational institutions; so were the Jewish rabbi and the Muslim *ulama* who still blends theology with legal authority in Islamic states like contemporary Iran” (Collins 2000:214). Most famously, Mandarin China’s examination system functioned as an education-based system for allocating social status for over 2000 years.

However, the establishment of Western-style schooling in all of these societies has displaced other systems of credentialing (with the apparent current exceptions of the theocracies in Iran and Afghanistan). (See, for example, Hayhoe 1992 for an overview of the transformation of the Chinese system.) As Randall Collins puts it, “[I]n general we can say that the German university system of the early 1800s and its sequence of credentials was adopted throughout the West; now, the twentieth century American version of mass competition within this system has been adopted virtually worldwide”

(2000:236). If children still tend to inherit their parents' social status around the world, then, they must increasingly do so though the mechanism of achievement in Western-style schooling. In other words, schooling dangles external rewards in front of most children, not just in the North but throughout the world.

It follows that D'Amato's synthesis, with which I began this essay, may apply to the global South after all. In the North, there are two different categories of students operating in a stratified society where status is controlled by access to university, especially to high-status universities. Caste-like minorities and lower-class students are required to attend school but question that they will gain access to the university and its rewards; hence they resist from within. On the other hand, for children in Guinea and in other countries where schooling is not yet universal, future status is determined, first, by who gets into school at all. Therefore, relatively speaking, all the children in Guinean schools are in the position of the white middle-class children of the United States.¹¹ Therefore, whatever intrinsic joy in schooling they may find—and some do find it—children in the global South have strong *extrinsic* motivation to stay in school and to succeed. They are ready to put up with long walks to school, long hours on hard benches in hot classrooms, sometimes without breakfast, corporal punishment for the reward they hope it will bring.¹²

In other words, for those who manage to enter and continue in school in the South, there is a pay-off analogous to the pay-off in the North for students who manage to enter high status universities. By D'Amato's logic, all students in the South, like

¹¹ Actually, the situation is more nuanced. Rural children's schools are less likely to lead to adequate academic achievement, and girls face more barriers than boys; ADEA Jan 2004

¹² Diallo (2003) illustrates the individual and familial strategies of children, particularly girls, who succeed at getting into secondary school in the Republic of Guinea. These case studies show the students and their families focused on the extrinsic rewards of schooling.

middle-class and immigrant students in the North, bend to school's tyranny for strong instrumental reasons.¹³

5. Schooling Shapes Childhood Experiences

In spite of wide variation in experience on the ground, then, it is legitimate to speak of schooling as a single global phenomenon in some sense. Now, how does that matter to children and childhood?

It matters, first, because schooling in its current global form shapes the actual experiences of childhood in several ways. We have already considered the function of schooling as the new and often dominant mechanism for determining adult status. No longer is a person's fate determined only by his or her diligence as an adult worker. No longer is it determined by the affluence or influence of his or her family. Now the child's future fate depends at least in part on effort made and success achieved in school. The child from a good family will not automatically succeed, and the child living in difficult circumstances has a chance of succeeding, because success depends increasingly on achievement in school. Other forms of deliberate education like initiation rituals were not designed to weed out students in the same way; rather, they were meant to prepare the entire age group to the same level. Describing the severe hazing of initiation in an aboriginal Australian group circa 1900, George Spindler argued, "The whole operation of

¹³ [Check on Loxley-Heynemann effect of schools in the South, i.e., schools *do* matter relative to family background in the South and Coleman does not apply, plus LeTendre's critique that the effect may be waning.] [Also, caution: 1/3/04 NYT article suggests that not all children rush to school in the South—mostly because of the demands for child labor. School systems in India and elsewhere are paying families if their children attend. Actually, this supports the idea that school is attractive because of its economic rewards; those who can afford to send their kids do.]

the initiation school is managed to produce success. ... There are no dropouts” (2000 [1989]: 185).¹⁴

Schooling also shapes the contexts in which children develop and learn. The time spent in school is time taken away from traditional childhood tasks means loss of opportunity for certain kinds of learning. For example, as children in the Amazon basin in Ecuador increasingly participate in Western-style schooling provided by North American missionaries, they have less time and opportunity to learn to chant, make tools, hunt, and gather (Rival 2000).

Part of the context of learning is the age and sex of the caretakers, which, according to Beatrice and John Whiting’s extensive research on childhood across the globe, are the most powerful shapers of a child’s personality (B. Whiting & Edwards 1988; J. Whiting 1990). There is no fixed world pattern for the sex of elementary schoolteachers, who are more likely women in the North but may be male or female in the South. We *can* comment on the sex of children’s playmates and classmates. In some societies, such as traditional Navajo society (Frayser 1985), children tend to cluster or may even be pressed into same-sex play groups. Yet almost universally, elementary schools are co-educational. Even in countries where female seclusion is important, such as Pakistan, separate girls’ schools have apparently not been common, at least not until very recently (Herz, Subbarao, Habib, and Raney 1991:29). Schooling has thus shifted girls and boys in many parts of the world from a gender-segregated to a gender-mixed world. Granted, the effect must depend on local gender practices and gender ideologies,

¹⁴ Some of my colleagues in Guinea raise the objection that children actually are permanently typed based on their stoicism during initiation ceremony. However, it is still true that none of them gets officially excluded in the way that opting for a vocational track excludes a student in France from taking the Math-oriented baccalaureate exam or failing calculus excludes students from certain career paths in the United States.

but it is the global imposition of co-education that makes us ask the question in the first place.

Regarding the age of caretakers, there is great variation in world socialization patterns, from child nurses to care by grandparents. The Whittings found that children reared largely in child peer groups tended to be more nurturant and less independent-minded, while children who spent much of their time with adults tended to be more independent but less nurturant. Schooling places children in a room with 15-100 children and 1-2 adults for several hours a day for several years. No doubt, the precise impact depends on whether the children come to school from a child-dominant setting, as in some Hawaiian families, or from an adult-dominant setting, as in middle-class U.S. homes. The impact of the classroom age structure also must depend on the actual child: adult ratio and the teachers' philosophy about it. Thus Japanese preschool teachers reported that a ratio of 40 children per adult teacher was a good thing because it allowed children to interact without adult intervention, whereas a ratio of about 8 to 1 is required by law in U.S. preschools; Tobin et al. 1989. However, we can assume that this "egg-carton" social structure surely has some significance for children's experience.

Schooling affects age grading, overriding biological definitions of childhood stages even more forcefully than other cultural interventions. Schooling has expanded well into the reproductive years, to the point that girls' school achievement depends in some countries on their success in avoiding pregnancy (Bledsoe 1990). Extended schooling can delay the age of social adulthood by as much as a decade for those who go to graduate school.¹⁵ Schooling also reaches back before what human growth scholars

¹⁵ However, adulthood is highly variable across cultures. In rural Ireland it did not come for a man until his aged parents finally retired, at which point he might be in his 40s himself.

call the “juvenile” stage (that is, before the age of about 6), incorporating children too young to fend for themselves into an organization composed of “strangers” rather than kin.

Finally, schooling makes new ideas available to children as learners. Even where schooling begins in a local language, it usually exposes children to a national or world language. In Guinea, for example, children learn two or three local languages at home and on the street, but they learn French at school. In many countries, a world language is an important passport to urban jobs from the civil service to driving a taxi. Likewise, schooling exposes children to literacy in a national or world language, and as rates of schooling go up, official literacy rates follow. Moreover, exposure to the idea of books, even if books are not readily available in the classroom, introduces children to new definitions of authoritative knowledge and its uses that may differ from that learned in the extended family, in Quranic school, or in other settings. For example, the ideology of school knowledge in West Africa as free and available contrasts with local traditional ideas that important knowledge is secret and reserved for the few (Bledsoe 1992). As world culture theorists argue, schooling also exposes children to a certain conception of themselves as individual citizens of a nation (and perhaps of the world; Reed-Danahay 2003). Thus in Guinea children learn that, whatever their linguistic and religious ties to local groups and to groups that transcend West Africa, they belong to the nation of Guinea with its peculiar geography, political structure, and post-independence history. The same children learn, too, about the wider world that they have not seen (although they may well visit it some day). In the inland Forest region of Guinea, children

memorize that “an ocean is a vast expanse of salt water,” and they copy maps of U.S. geography into their notebooks.

6. Schooling Shapes Cultural Conceptions of the Child

Schooling as we have currently organized it also shapes everyday and scientific conceptions of childhood. As I have argued elsewhere, certain organizational features of primary schooling as we currently practice it in the North have generated certain understandings (Anderson-Levitt 1996; 2002).

First, there is the tendency to focus, within schools, on traits of the individual child to explain performance in school. This is not surprising given that we depend on schools to evaluate children as individuals and to sort them accordingly. The tendency to focus on the child’s traits rather than the teacher’s performance is exacerbated to the extent that egg-carton schooling makes it difficult to compare teachers and hence lets the teacher slip into the background as the taken-for-granted and seemingly constant element in a classroom of varied children.¹⁶ (Note however that certain systems of teacher mentoring, as in China and Japan and some training experiences I witnessed in Guinea, encourage teachers to compare themselves to their peers and hence to notice their own effect as well as student traits as explanations of student learning.)

Much of the trait talk focuses around the world on the child’s effort and motivation. At least, it was certainly the case the teachers punished children for failing to make an effort in Guinea. Meanwhile, studies of teachers’ beliefs in the United States,

¹⁶ There is also a tendency built into the structure to attribute problems to a child’s parents or home. At least in the North, as Willard Waller pointed out, parent and teacher are natural enemies. Schooling in the South may not have the same structure built in, and hence the focus may be all the more on the individual child’s traits.

Belgium, Germany, and France identified “effort” as a salient category when teachers explained students’ performances.

However, in France, the United States, Belgium, and Germany, teachers also explain a child’s performance with the curious concept of “maturity.” Maturity, in the school context, can be thought of as a child’s mental age. For example, one teacher who took the notion of maturity particularly seriously told me, “Sébastien was tested by the psychologist, who found that, as far as reading and math go, he has the age—that is, the level—of 5 years 3 months to 5 years 6 months, so he cannot learn to read.”

I suggest that this notion of “maturity” developed in response to structural features of schooling in the North. First, we accept that, given the function of the school to sort, we will evaluate children as individuals. Second, we have organized the curriculum in the form of a linear, graded instruction that moves from easier to harder, from one stage to the next.¹⁷ Thus, for example, the first-grade teachers I worked with in France expected that most students would learn to read some words by sight first, and then would catch on to the principle of decoding, and finally would be able to read fluently through a combination of word recognition and decoding. The curriculum was organized into these three stages. A linear, graded curriculum makes it easy to judge individual children against one another according to their progress through the expected stages. Schooling comes to resemble a race. Third, where there is a compulsory starting age for school, we can associate progress through the stages with the typical or average age at which children reach each stage. Given those three conditions, what is more “natural”—albeit culturally constructed—to speak of a child as a “year behind” or “six

¹⁷ For the most part. The curriculum in France and in some U.S. schools does allow for a certain circling back to cover the same content covered a year or two earlier, but in more depth.

months ahead” of his or her peers? Thus schooling leads to this academic concept of maturity and immaturity.

Teachers in France, Belgium, Germany, the United States and elsewhere also talk about the child’s intelligence. Apparently every society has a notion of intelligence or competence by which people, including children, can be judged (Goldberg 1982), although notions of intelligence vary, being associated, for example, with quickness in some societies but with slow deliberation in others (e.g., Wober 1974). However, I suggest that the notion of academic intelligence as we now understand it in the United States is another notion the derived from the advent of compulsory schooling (Anderson-Levitt 1996). Alfred Binet designed early tests to measure intelligence with reference to children’s school performances. Binet interpreted his measure of performance as “mental age,” the rough equivalent of the concept of maturity discussed above.¹⁸ It follows that the concept of academic intelligence derived from the same features of schooling—evaluation of individual children, linear graded instruction, and a compulsory starting age—as the concept of maturity. The concepts did not emerge from pure psychological research; rather, psychologists who refined these concepts (Jean Piaget as well as Binet) first encountered the concepts in problems posed by mass compulsory schooling (Anderson-Levitt 1996).¹⁹

¹⁸William Stern later converted Binet’s concept to the concept of the intelligence quotient or I.Q., which so influences thinking about intelligence in the United States. Like Binet, Stern interpreted his measure of performance as “mental age.” However, Stern also expressed mental age not as “years behind” or “years ahead” of peers, as Binet had, but rather as a quotient, mental age divided by chronological age. His mathematical transformation of the concept meant that there was no making up a lag; I.Q. was expected to be fixed.

¹⁹ An important point about concepts of intelligence: In the global North, schooling tends to make boys look “stupid,” at least in the primary grades where girls outperform them in language arts. In secondary school and higher education, a select subset of boys then begins to look smarter than girls as they outperform girls in math. In contrast, in parts of the global South, schooling constructs “stupidity” in girls.

Another trait that teachers often cite in first-grade classrooms in France and the United States is the child's age, measured in months. For instance, a teacher in France said of a child, "She's old; she was born in January" (Anderson-Levitt 2002: 201), just as teachers in the United States have been heard to say, "He's a January child" or "He's an August birthday" (Graue 1993: 183, 193). (I should note that what counted as "old" or "young" was not exactly the same between France and the United States: a child beginning first grade at the age of 6 years 1 month would be considered "young" in the United States but not particularly young in France.) All else being equal, teachers expected older children to perform better. When that did not happen, teachers made reference to immaturity, that is, mental age out of kilter with chronological age.

Taken in global perspective, this focus on pinpoint chronological age is an astounding new development. Kapsiki parents in Kenya measure childhood not in months but in chunks of time that span years. They divide childhood into only three stages (Harkness and Super 1983), as do Ifaluk parents on the other side of the world (Lutz 1985), while Marquesans do not differentiate among "kids" at all until the sexually active stage (Kirkpatrick 1985). Western Europeans themselves only gradually broke childhood into stages during the 16th and 17th centuries (Ariès 1962) and, even when they did, age grades mattered little in some rural areas until well into the 20th century (Prost 1981). Yet teachers in France and the United States have created micro-age stages—in societies where human beings live longer and are schooled longer than ever before.²⁰

Both teachers we interviewed and girls themselves tended to believe that boys were smarter, as demonstrated by their superior school achievement.

²⁰ Is this analogous to the micro-stages of infancy presented in manuals for new parents? Perhaps, since one month represents a about the same proportion of a baby's first year of life as 5 months—the difference

I suggest that the focus on age is encouraged by the same features that lead us to focus on maturity and intelligence, plus one more-- a fixed start date for the school year. As a result of the fixed day for school entry, new first graders do not begin moving through the stages of instruction at *exactly* the same age. The legal school-entry age in France, for example, actually ranges from 5 years 9 months to 6 years 9 months. Schools were not always organized that way. The rural French children Wylie (1974) observed in the 1950s began school on the day of their birthday, whatever the time of year. Some urban school districts in the United States used to let children enter school in either September or January. However, today in France all children begin their school careers on a specified day in September, as is also the case in most U.S. school districts.

It is true that 12 months represents a large portion of a first grader's life. Yet consider how, in the context of the 4-year range of school-starting ages of the 17th century, a 12-month range would have appeared negligible. In fact, in the French first-grade classrooms I studied, there was actually an age range of 3 years because of the grade-skippers and grade-repeaters. In that context, one might think a 12-month range would be unremarkable. However, educators seem to focus on the fiction of legal age and not the actual age range of first graders. Given the pretense that "almost all" children start first grade at age 6, age differences of just a few months become a salient difference among children and thus become available as a handy explanation of performance.

Now, my arguments in this section do not hold for children in all parts of the global South. In some parts of the South, starting age, even if set by compulsory schooling legislation, remains fluid in practice. No one would expect teachers to measure

between a "July birthday" and a "December birthday" represents to a first grader. Even so, the question remains—are we recognizing biologically determined stages or creating culturally defined stages?

student ages in months when their first graders still range in age, as they do in Guinea, from five to ten years old. It should also follow that the concepts of maturity and of intelligence in the sense of “mental age” would not offer themselves as readily to teachers in those countries. Here is a testable hypothesis: where schooling becomes completely universal and more strictly linked to age, as in the North, expect more talk about age, maturity and academic intelligence, not simply because these concepts diffuse from North American and European academia, but because of the real circumstances in which teachers find themselves evaluating children and explaining their failures. Indeed, we should be able to test this hypothesis already, for example, by comparing teacher talk in Latin America, where participation rates are high, with teacher talk in sub-Saharan Africa or the Indian subcontinent, where participation rates are lower.²¹

7. Conclusion

In summary, schooling as more or less the same institution, albeit practiced very differently on the ground, has spread around the globe. Almost everywhere children participate in it for at least a few months if not a few years.

The spread of Western-style schooling means that children growing up around the globe have a more uniform experience of socialization than in the past. That is because, varied as it is, schooling is a more uniform experience than family socialization, which

²¹ Teachers in Guinea talked a lot about students’ effort. One teacher argued that more effort is required, morally speaking, from the more intelligent. B: “Appris par maître que mieux on est intelligent (savant) on doit toujours se perfectionner (apprendre). » Int Kin 10-17-98. There was also occasional talk from teachers in Guinea about intelligence and brilliance, but more in reference to themselves: A teacher about herself: “She was young when she finished the ENP (meaning, as I commented with her confirmation, that she had moved through school quickly without repeating). Since she was intelligent, someone offered for her to continue her studies (in Conakry?), but her grand frère did not accept. So she began her teaching career”. – EcGr “His teachers recognized his brilliant intelligence—he was always first in his class and could understand and remember anything—and they were the ones who took over his education.” –FN 10-15-98 Foré .

has taken several different forms. Schooling has roughly a single structure.²² Is it more uniform than, say, children's work experiences? It probably is, when you compare shoe shining in the streets of Conakry to caring for siblings to making carpets in Afghanistan.²³

Schooling has partially displaced other socialization patterns, including sibcare and gender segregation and the learning of local knowledge through formal or informal apprenticeship to elders. It has brought new kinds of age-grading, including micro-age-grading of the early years, and new conceptions of intelligence, maturity, perhaps of ability vs. effort. And because of school's sorting function, the performance of young children will determine their future (and perhaps that of their family)—in contrast, for instance, to situations where success depends on events in adolescence or young adulthood, such as making a good match or on starting out one's farm or business well?).²⁴ By sorting, schooling blocks the mobility of many in the North, which is contrary to its alleged purpose. However, schooling sorts more fairly than (many? all other?) systems in stratified societies—caste, rank, wealthy. It does promise mobility as well as intellectual liberation, even if the promise often turns out to be a false promise.

²² At most, there are two basic forms of primary school organization: the "traditional" face-front age-graded classroom with one teacher and 20-100 students, which was once the modern system that replaced the old one-room school recitation-based classroom; and, secondly, the student-centered classroom with students working on different projects in small groups or individually. I submit that the latter model is not as common as we think, although it is present as an alternative to the standard.

²³ Is it more uniform than apprenticeships? Perhaps not; how many children learn through apprenticeships? Is schooling more uniform than exposure to pop music and television? I don't know—but we do know that children learn more from face-to-face exposure than from television, at least when it comes to learning language. To early induction into the military? That, at least, is less common.

²⁴ This premise assumes that primary and early secondary experience sets the path for adolescence and access to higher education; statistically speaking, it does.

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