Homogenous and Heterogeneous Cultural Settings and their Implications for Nomadic Education

A Study of Mongolia and Nigeria

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Introduction

Nomads have been a consistently marginalized group in terms of education, due in part to the cultural differences between them and their education providers (Dyer 2001). Many factors make designing education programs which are appropriate to their lifestyle very difficult. These issues include logistics, due to their mobility, cultural differences and costs. UNESCO's Education For All program has placed an international emphasis on reaching marginalized groups, including nomads. To do so, the major hurdles to their education must be closely examined. This paper focuses on the cultural implications of nomadic education.

In a world of nation-states, the education of nomads is largely left in the hands of culturally sedentary governments. Nigeria, in particular, has been lauded for its innovative attempts reaching out to its many cultural and ethnic groups, including nomads (Ezeomah, 2006). Unfortunately, even Nigeria's achievements in formal education have been quite low (Umar, 2006).

Mongolia, in contrast, is a culturally homogenous state (Robinson, 1997). Around half of its population are pastoralists (nomadic animal herders) and the country has a long nomadic history. Coming from minimal literacy rates at the beginning of the twentieth century, more than 90% of Mongolians are now literate (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Its efforts have been quite successful in creating effective education for nomads.

Many factors influence this large difference in success. Some, such as conflict and cost, cannot be understated. But culture is of equal importance in this issue. This paper will focus on and discuss the implications of nomads existing in culturally homogenous and heterogeneous societies and how this affects the process of creating education systems appropriate for them.

Three areas will be considered: curriculum, teachers and nomads' perception of education. These subjects represent what is being taught, who is teaching and who is being taught, the three most important components of education. As the exact situation of nomads varies widely over the world,

this paper aims to maximize its generalizability by looking at the most basic aspects of their education and ignore less culturally sensitive issues such as logistic concerns. To understand each component, a brief overview of the subject as it pertains to each country will be reviewed and important comparisons will subsequently be made. This paper argues that the situations of nomads in culturally heterogeneous and homogenous societies are fundamentally different, regardless of the particular cultures therein, and that understanding these differences is vital to creating effective and viable education programs for nomadic groups.

Background

Mongolia

Mongolia resides in central Asia between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China. With 3.13 million inhabitants and an area of 1.5 million km^2, it has the lowest population density of any independent country in the world (CIA World Factbook). Consisting mainly of mountains, the Gobi Desert and the Great Steppe, Mongolia has a relatively harsh climate with limited rainfall and temperatures ranging widely from -30° to 30° (IMCG). Over three quarters of the land is pasturable (Enkhtuvshin, 2007). Thus, pastoralism has had a long tradition as the preferred livelihood, outstripping sedentary agriculture in effectiveness under the sever conditions.

Mongolia has been relatively autonomous throughout its history, beginning with the Mongolian empire established by Genghis Khan around the year 1200 (History). Khan's empire developed into the largest empire in history stretching from Poland to Korea. He is still a revered symbol of pastoralism in Mongolia partially because his military prowess was based largely on mobility and horsemanship (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Under his rule, even the capital city was nomadic, routinely changing locations. Khan's image is still used upon national symbols and awards. Long after his death, Mongolia fell under Chinese jurisdiction but retained considerable independent powers (History). From then on through the beginning of the twentieth century, Mongolia and its independence was an

area of diplomatic dispute between Russia and China. Troops from the foreign powers flowed intermittently flowed in and out of the territory, exacerbating tensions between socialists and Chinese loyalists.

The Mongolian Socialist Revolution occurred in 1921. The Mongolian People's Republic was formed in 1924 making Mongolia the second socialist country in the world (History; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005). The new government focused on education and literacy rates rose rapidly over the twentieth century (more detail in the Curriculum section) (Demberel & Penn, 2006). The country was organized into 21 *aimags* (regions) which were further subdivided into *soums*. To accommodate the large pastoral population (over 50% at the time), a network of boarding schools was established. This system was expensive and Mongolia was still a very poor country. As a member of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), 30% of Mongolia's income comes in the form of aid, mainly from Russia (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Due to its swift rise in education and infrastructure development, Mongolia was touted as a 'flagship' of poor countries (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005, p. 23). Government ownership and organization of herds and herders in *negdel* groups ensured adequate provision of supplies and prevented overgrazing. The central organization of herding, its acceptance and its effectiveness reflect how integral to Mongolian identity nomadism remained despite the change in political climate. Mongolia's socialist period is a unique instance of pastoralism taking part and thriving in modernization thanks in part to the shared culture between nomadic and sedentary populations.

The dissolution of the USSR had an immense impact on Mongolia. Though the country moved to democracy and a market-driven economy in 1990, the loss of Soviet aid effectively crashed the economy. Described as "the most significant peacetime economic collapse of any nation this century," Mongolia has since been forced to reconsider and reorganize its extensive social welfare programs, particularly the expensive boarding school system (Robinson, 1997, p. 13). The boarding schools make

up an integral part in Mongolian nomadic education and thus recent years have been plagued by a crisis in pastorals schooling. Mongolia's adjustment to this provides and interesting opportunity to observe their commitment and approach to nomadic education. The economic changes have also caused massive urban migration and created a social-stratification that Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe fear may have a permanent effect on the education system as a whole (2005).

Yet, while recent changes have weakened the equity of the nation, Mongolia still has a largely homogenous culture (Robinson, 1997). Collectivism and equality are still major aspects of the Mongolian perspective and pastoralism has remained an integral and respected part of life. Under pressure from large development banks, Mongolia has effectively halved its education budget since the shift to democracy but the government has made great efforts to preserve the boarding school system (Steinder-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005). Moreover, all Mongolians share the same history, customs and ethnic identity. To this day, the only major difference between sedentary and nomadic Mongolians is their style of livelihood. So while pastoralists must coexist with another economic group, they find themselves within the same homogeneous cultural group as their sedentary counterparts.

Nigeria

Nigeria is a country of extreme diversity. Within this large nation of 152 million people, there are about 250 ethnicities as well as 10 recognized nation and regional languages (USDOS). Even the nomadic population is made up of a variety of different cultures and peoples. There are 6 groups of nomadic populations in Nigeria (Aderinoye, 2007). Five are considered pastoralists (nomadic animal herders): the Fulani (sometimes called Fulbe), the Shuwa, the Buduman, the Kwayam, and the Badawi. The sixth group is commonly referred to as 'The Fishermen' and are mobile along the nation's various rivers. The Fulani are the largest group, making up 5.3 million of the total 9.3 million nomads in Nigeria. Discussion on nomadic groups in this writing will focus on pastoralists, usually on the Fulani in particular in Nigeria's case. The population of nomadic children who are school age or younger is

about 3.1 million, a third of the overall nomadic population and the same number of people in the entirety of Mongolia. Needless to say, Nigeria is a very multicultural, heterogeneous society and the sheer scope of its variety makes providing education a daunting task.

Nigeria has been the home to many powerful nations including the Hausa kingdoms, the Benin Empire, the Kingdom of Nri and the Kanem-Bornu Empire (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The most recent and powerful entity before colonization was the Fulani Empire. Unlike Genghis Khan's Mongolian Empire, the Fulani Empire was strongly sedentary, illustrating that pastoralism is not an intrinsic Fulani concept. In fact, only about 10% of Fulani are pastoralists. The ethnic group has a long history, dating up to modern times, of sedentary, urban civilization along side that of pastoralist life.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the European countries began to conquer and divide the various nations of sub-Saharan Africa (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Britain claimed what would become Nigeria. Nigerian ethnic groups were further divided through slave-trade, as some groups preyed on others for profit. The long and slow process of independence allowed British style education to become the standard model for the Nigerian system (United States Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria). At the time of its official separation from Britain in 1960, Nigeria had a contentious cultural landscape split upon ethnic, political and religious lines (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Differences were decisive enough that part of the country split off to join Cameroon within the first year. The fragile political atmosphere led to a series of military coups, secession and civil war over the next thirty years. Current democratic elections are routinely condemned by the international community for their corruption. Much of the ethnic differences remain unabated or have even deepened over the last forty years. Despite its tumultuous past, Nigeria is routinely used as a positive example in regards to its efforts in nomadic education (Imhabekhai, 2004). While its success has been minimal (literacy rates for pastoralists are estimated at 0.28%), Nigeria has employed a variety of experimental methods to try and reach out to nomads (Aderinoye, 2007). The country is still overcoming difficulties in education and

many other arena's which are made more difficult by the diverse cultures not only within the country but with in nomadic groups as well.

The usefulness of selecting these two countries is apparent when they are viewed in an experimental sense. Mongolian nomads exist in a 'neutral' environment and act as a 'control group.' Nigerian pastoralists receive the 'treatment' of interacting with education providers outside of their culture. The resulting contrast highlights areas of education which are affected specifically by cultural differences. The findings are generalizable and thus the examination of nomadic curriculum, teachers and perspective is necessary for overcoming the pervasive problems in pastoral education.

Curriculum

Curriculum development has generally been a difficult issue in pastoralist education. In the past, subject matter has focused on economic aspects of nomadic life such as agriculture and animal husbandry (Krätli, 2006). As curriculum creators have traditionally been sedentary institutions, the outsider's perspective of nomadic economy has been a significant influence on what materials are provided. As Krätli outlines, there has been a steady progression in the perception of nomadic economic behavior which have influenced opinions of pastoral culture in general (2006). In the early part of the twentieth century, all aspects of nomadic life were look upon as 'backwards,' particularly the efficiency of animal husbandry. By the 1980's, the utility of nomadic production, in the face of difficult environmental condition and overgrazing, began to be viewed as an adequate means of raising animals and, consequently, a valuable national resource. Opinion of nomadic culture had not yet reached a similar appreciation and experts thought it should be discarded in order to further modernize production. Finally in the last two decades, agricultural experts purport that the holistic pastoralist lifestyle is “the most efficient and sustainable way of exploiting the natural resources of the drylands” (Krätli, 2006, p. 13). Yet, Köhler-Rollefson and Bräuning note that educators still have not recognized the danger of focusing of productivity instead of viewing animal husbandry as an “integral part of

cultural identity” (1999). Nomads livelihood is often inexorably linked with their cultural and spiritual beliefs so efforts to change or 'improve' the economic aspect can be viewed as a cultural affront.

The focus on livelihood instead of lifestyle is also indicative of a greater ethnocentrism. Nomadic education, with few exceptions, is designed as a transformational tool to 'modernize' pastoralists (Carr-Hill & Peart, 2005; Ezeomah, 1987; Imhabekhai, 2004; Krätli, 2006). Here, curriculum creators use 'modernize' to mean improving standards of living from a sedentary perspective. Current policies expect to provide an “emancipation” from traditional living while not demanding a change in livelihood (Imhabekhai, 2004; Krätli, 2006). To assume that pastoralists can be or need to be 'freed' from their lifestyle is inherently, though often not purposefully, ethnocentric and antagonistic to nomadic values. The following country-focused sections describe the dynamics and consequences of this mismatch between pastoral and sedentary perspectives.

Mongolia

In the case of curriculum, Mongolian education has benefited immensely from its homogeneity both in its socialist past and in its burgeoning democratic future. Under socialism, a great deal of pastoral life was centralized (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Clothing, fuel and other supplies were often provided for free at *soum* centers. Grazing patterns and the composition of herds were organized by the government to promote productivity and prevent overgrazing. In addition to the effects of socialism, the long history of Mongolian pastoralism and its pervasiveness as a profession have legitimized nomadic knowledge as expertise in animal husbandry (Enkhtuvshin, 2007). Thus thanks to the universal connection to pastoralism and the government's participation in it, curriculum designers had no motivation or need to focus schooling on productivity issues. As with many nomadic societies, Mongolians viewed the work children did at home (animal handling, herd movement, etc) to be the central factor in their 'professional' education (Krätli, 2006). So schooling had to focus elsewhere.

Modern Mongolia has lost a great deal of its formal school resources, generally in the form of

boarding schools, and so has had to design curricula for new methods. With the privatization of herds and massive decline of the economy, many Mongolians who were not previously pastoralists have been given animals (Enkhtuvshin, 2007). Former doctors, teachers, government administrators and even former veterinarians have now taken up animal husbandry. These people do not have the same expertise that long time animal owners do. Enkhtuvshin describes the situation by saying that traditional pastoral practices have been "defected" (2007, p. 13). Yet, issues of animal husbandry are not highlighted when pastoralists are surveyed about the subjects they would like to learn about (Robinson, 1995; Robinson, 1997).

So what was put into the curricula, both new and old? Under the 70 years of Soviet governance, formal education did little to directly address pastoral issues (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Throughout the first half of the century, literacy was emphasized greatly while other areas of education were essentially left in the same state as they were during the 1921 revolution. By 1963, literacy rates exceeded 90%. In the 1940's, primary education became universally accessible. Mongolia closely followed Russia's Soviet model by not only providing education free of charge but also using a similar subject set of mathematics, physics, astronomy, etc. In addition, many of their text books were translations of Russian texts (Mongolian began using the Cyrillic script in 1941) (Mongolian Languages). Thus, Mongolia's Soviet-styled curriculum largely ignored the fact that half the population was nomadic. Yet, equality was emphasized (Demberel & Penn, 2006). Nomadic children competed on an equal footing with their sedentary counterparts in regional and national academic competitions. Many nationally recognized figures, such as cosmonauts and politicians, came from pastoral backgrounds.

The modern curriculum, at least in formal education, has remained very much the same, though its quality has dropped (Steiner-Khamsi & Gerelmaa, 2009). Austerity measures have decreased funding for school maintenance, teacher salaries and curriculum development. In an effort to do more

with less, MECS (Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) has begun to develop distance education programs. In conjunction with UNESCO, the Mongolian government began to develop the 'Gobi Women's Project' in 1991 (UNESCO). This time, the needs of pastoralists did become the focus and an intensive study was done to find out what those needs were. The project's target clients were rural, adult women. Those interviewed did not express a desire to learn more about animal husbandry. Instead, topics revolved around dealing with the change from socialism to capitalism. Many women wanted instruction on how to fabricate items that were once provided free by the government. These included garments, fuel created from dung, wool and felt. Handcrafts were also included to enable the women to make more money. Other topics included family planning, general health (particularly for young women) and 'from-scratch' cooking. The literacy aids that the women eventually used were not focused on pastoral economy but rather Mongolian fairy tales. These subjects were included in booklets and radio programs and a teacher came to see each student, at their *ger* (tent-home), every two weeks.

The lack of materials which focus on animal production and nomad-specific behavior indicates which areas of pastoral life have the biggest need for 'expansion.' If education's goal is to expand the ability and options of the learner, Mongolians have expressed clearly that they have more pressing needs and desires than to focus on animal husbandry, a subject they learn first-hand from birth. They want education to explore new areas rather than what they already deal with on a daily basis.

Nigeria

Nigeria, on the other hand, has focused on making materials which specifically address pastoral livelihood. Primary level sciences include 'Animal Management' and 'Agricultural Science' (Krätli, 2006). Mathematical problems use animal husbandry themed contexts. The Federal Ministry of Education called this new shift a 'cultural adjustment' of the curriculum. Yet none of these new 'relevant' subjects pertain to the actual culture of the Fulani and other pastoral group (that is, their

religion, customs, etc). Instead, the government has assumed 'cultural' means 'economic,' in the case of nomads. It assumes that mobility and practical animal husbandry are the essence of pastoral culture. In reality, nomads' relationship with their animals is highly spiritual and their values are profoundly different from that of other groups (Abdi, 2005). The mistake is not surprising simply because their economic mode of life is the most obvious and easiest to understand difference between sedentary education developers and pastoralists. However, their openness to shifting curriculum to better suit the Fulani and others is commendable and a crucial first step towards a successful system.

But more sophisticated tailorings of the curriculum are in the works. McCaffery, Sanni, Ezeomah and Pennells designed a trial literacy project to test 'learner-generated material' (LGM) (Ezeomah *et al,* 2006). Within the program, Fulani nomads spoke to researchers about their own stories, customs and issues. The speakers' words were then written and published in small booklets. The stories were printed in Fulfulde, Hausa and English. Authorship was attributed to the original speakers, the pastorists themselves. Ezeomah *et al* report that the booklets were an extremely popular resource among the nomadic Fulani and the production process “enabled participants to explain their way of life, express their frustrations and share important information with others” (2006, p. 241). The Fulani marked their success with non-pastoral and non-academic activities like being able to read road signs, check validity of receipts and identifying out-of-date medicines. What they saw as success reflects what values they seek in acquiring literacy and numeracy, that is an ability to gain greater function *outside* of pastoral economy.

Discussion

The comparison of Mongolia to Nigeria shows an important difference between economically relevant subject matter and culturally appropriate subject context. In socialist Mongolia, the subject matter was largely irrelevant to the education system's success. Foreign texts were used, sciences had little to do with animal husbandry, etc. Standard Nigerian curriculum for nomads did include 'relevant'

subjects, focusing on economic issues. That focus created a cultural disconnect in Nigeria between education developers and education targets that does not exist in Mongolia. The most modern systems succeed precisely because the nomads feel a homogeny between themselves and the context of the learning. In Mongolia, students learned at their homes with a teacher who intrinsically understood their culture. In Nigeria, the learning materials had the most effect when they were culturally, not economically, based and in their own tongue. Ezeomah *et al* note that the 'social cohesion' of the Fulani nomads was a major aid, not a hindrance as before, in implementing the program (2006). Once a leader had accepted the usefulness of the program, the community accepted it in turn. Thus, homogenous participation and belief in the program is also important to encouraging new participants to join and invest in the program.

The conclusion, in terms of curriculum, is clear. Subject matter must be generated directly from the target culture and often has little to do with pastoral livelihood. Nigerian officials had trouble reconciling their cultural understanding of nomadic life with that of the pastorlists themselves. Thus, a false set of needs, such as further education in animal husbandry, was imposed on the learners. More importantly, the cultural context of the materials must align with that of the target. Mongolian educators had little problem setting the learning environment in an appropriate context because they shared a common Mongolian history and culture with the pastoralists and many developers came from nomadic backgrounds. Nomads were not only seen as equals but also as included. Viewing a learner in terms of their 'otherness' impedes the development process and, perhaps, ensures failure. This in part explains the overwhelming success of LGM's in Nigeria. LGM's, when properly produced, both ensure a relevant subject and create a culturally homogenous learning environment for the learner. The most important lesson is that the difficulties of a culturally heterogeneous education system *can* be overcome with appropriate communication and a deference for the learner's culture.

Teachers

Teachers form the backbone of education. Thus, their selection, training, support and treatment are crucial factors in the effectiveness of any learning program. Nomadic education in general is fraught with many issues including linguistics, background, turn-over and gender (Usman, 2005; Krätli, 2006).   This section will focus on teacher-related obstacles in Mongolia and Nigeria's education systems and then use comparisons of the two to illustrate the importance of creating a teaching atmosphere and perspective which reflect the student's culture.

Mongolia

While traditional Mongolian history and values are a central part of every Mongolian's life, other factors also connect the populace. The most prominent aspect is the collectivist attitude which most notably manifested itself as socialism. From its beginnings, the Mongolian People's Republic placed a high value on education (Demberel & Penn, 2006). However the country had an extremely small number of teachers at the time. These numbers were further limited as religion, particularly Buddhism, was suppressed. Mongolia's scant literacy at the time had been due mainly to Buddhist monks who had set up schools to train future officials. The monks' affiliation with the previous rulers put them at odds with socialists and they were left out of the new system. Mongolia had no other formal schooling system at the time and only opened its first elementary school in 1921. To speed up the education of the nation, the government turned to its people.

As the small schooling system grew, Mongolians were encouraged to teach each other. A home curriculum was designed and communal study circles became a common method of literacy instruction. Study circles are still a common today, partially revitalized by the Gobi Women's Project (discussed in more detail in the Curriculum section) (Demberel & Penn, 2006; Robinson, 1997). During the 1930's, materials and courses for home study were refined and expanded. The community-imposed obligation for literate Mongolians to teach others continued throughout the communist rule.

At the same, formal education slowly expanded. In 1922, a temporary school was set up to

retrain teachers, from Buddhist/Chinese values to the socialist curriculum. The school eventually became a permanent institution and the mass of teachers began to grow. The Mongolian government decreed in 1940 the goal to provide free primary education to all. The network of boarding schools was expanded to reach every *soum* center and within a generation Mongolia reached universal primary access.

Teachers in these boarding schools were well paid and highly respected (Demberel & Penn, 2006). In the boarding school environment, the educators played a variety of roles. They woke students, taught, ate with the pupils, oversaw discipline, ensured hygiene and health and put the children to bed. Many teachers felt it was their responsibility to reach out to parents who were unwilling to send their children to boarding school and convince them to take part in the formalized system. As discussed elsewhere, a large portion of teachers came from nomadic households themselves.

The formal and informal aspects of the system reflect the collectivist values Mongolians shared and expressed through socialism. The government and its teachers felt a great responsibility to educate the population in order to provide equality. Individuals were called upon, as *de facto* members of the government, to take part in the education of the country. These values are still present in Mongolia's culture and its interpretation of democracy today (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005). Robinson credits teacher's concerns for the collective in the success of recruiting qualified teachers for the GobiWomen's Project and in encouraging students to teach each other (1997). As nomads are considered a part of the Mongolian 'in-group,' the nations collectivism has had a strong, positive impact on how teachers interact with their students.

Nigeria

In contrast, Nigeria's diversity has not been compatible with the national collectivism found in Mongolia. Since its independence, the nation has been victim to the political contention, ethnic

discord, military coups and civil war seen in many post-colonialist countries (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Neither do Nigerians share a common pastoralist past like Mongolia. As Imhabekhai notes, the diversity of cultures and languages in Nigeria has impeded the country's ability to provide culturally appropriate education to nomads (2004).

Nigeria's problems with teaching staff primarily occur in recruitment, retention and training. Issues of retention stem mainly from differences between sedentary and nomadic lifestyles and between urban and rural lifestyles. Generally, Nigerian teachers have resisted rural postings in preference for urban life (Imhabekhai, 2004). Those that are assigned to these areas attempt to be reposted elsewhere through absenteeism, tardiness, desertion and leaving school early. Thus, preference is given to teachers coming from pastoral or local backgrounds under the assumption that these educators are more likely to stay. Unfortunately, due to the small share of the population nomads have, combined with their very low secondary completion rates, finding new trainable individuals with pastoral backgrounds is extremely difficult.

Moreover, assuming a teacher was willing to stay, their quality is likely to be quite low. In 2004, only 22.5% of instructors in nomadic primary schools had the minimum teaching qualifications (Umar, 2006). Even qualified teachers are generally regarded as unsatisfactory (Lewin & Stuart, 2003). To make matters worse for nomadic learners, teacher training does not include any instruction specifically addressing nomadic culture and needs (Umar, 2006). The NCE (Nigerian Certificate of Education) curriculum is based on the assumption that classrooms and the techniques needed within them are generally the same across the country. As in Mongolia, Nigeria's pedagogy focuses on equality. Yet this view often gets translated as 'similarity,' where all classroom environments can be addressed in a similar way. The lack of nuanced methods is of course a detriment to the quality of education throughout the diverse country, particularly for nomads. Researchers contend that pre-service training is more effective if it includes experiences that allow teachers to understand the culture

of their future classrooms (Osborne, 1989). Such understanding requires open and explicit discussion of cultural differences. Training can include discussions on differences and still remain tied to equality but the curriculum must become more nuanced.

Discussion

Mongolia's success in providing appropriate teachers seems to be a commendation for the country's pervasive sense of collectivism. But their cultural homogeny effectively sidesteps the major problems Nigeria faces and is a large factor in Mongolia's achievement of quality education. Without an extraordinarily diverse population like Nigeria's, Mongolia has not had to overcome even basic issues like finding teachers who speak the appropriate language of their students. Providing teachers with an education which allows them to work in a new cultural context is even more difficult. In addition, Mongolia's peer-to-peer education is not possible to similarly mobilize on a national scale in Nigeria. The costs of creating such materials for those kinds of programs in 9 different languages, some of which have no standard writing, are enormous. Mongolia's homogenous culture, language and politics has allowed it to begin developing a cohesive national education system immediately upon gaining independence from China in 1911. Nigeria, in contrast, spent many years sorting out ethnic and political division, retarding the development of a multiculturally sensitive system.

Perceptions of Education

To even begin an effort to educate, the cultural opinion of the learner towards education must be considered. The most important and representative parts of this opinion are the learner's expectations and concerns. The importance of concerns is especially pronounced for nomads as many pastoral groups have encountered programs whose underlying theory is the superiority of sedentary over nomadic life (Dall, 1993; Shahshahani, 1995). Thus, many mobile groups can initially view new education efforts as potential threats. Consequently, the increase in concerns necessitates a greater attention by the outside educator to nomads' expectations. If these expectations are not well addressed,

learners will not change their initially negative opinion of the new program.

That is not to say that nomads have a negative opinion of education itself. Dyer challenges the idea that nomads do not seek education (2001). Instead, she argues that nomads often have different standards for assessing the relevancy of education. Hence, a pastoral group's rejection of a program for practical reasons may be misunderstood by providers as a blanket disinterest in education. These misunderstandings are often the product of inappropriate assumptions about values. For example, western educators tend to view 'child labor' as an almost offensive practice. Nomads, on the other hand, see a child's participation in the group's economic practices as an integral part of their education (more on this below).

Discordant perspectives create an unfortunate trap for nomads. The distance between providers' and nomads' views on the relevancy of education is a major obstacle in realizing education programs for nomads. Yet, without any 'outside' education, nomads are unable to “challenge their public image” (Krätli 2006, p. 27). This makes understanding nomadic concern and expectations dramatically more important. The rest of this section tries to achieve an appropriate understanding by outlining the cultural perspectives of Mongolian and Nigerian pastoralists towards education, identifying differing cultural nuances and, more importantly, the commonalities between the two groups.

Mongolia

Equality is a integral part of Mongolian culture and central to the pastoralist view of education. Themes of collectivist equality are present during both their socialist and democratic periods (Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005). Pastoral education, as Penn explains, succeeded because of its “fair and egalitarian” approach (Demberel & Penn, 2006, p. 207). It was included within the greater socialist package of health and other services from which all Mongolians, sedentary and nomadic, benefited. This inclusion of nomad specific services within the greater welfare program showed pastoralists that their differing needs were respected but that they were valued in the same way as other Mongolians.

Demberel, while recounting his experiences growing up in socialist Mongolia, speaks about the importance pastoralists placed on equal educational opportunities (Demberel & Penn, 2006). As a nomad, he was proud to have equal opportunity at national mathematics competitions and that pastoralists had the same achievements in these activities as sedentary Mongolians. Additionally, he notes that exchange programs to Russia allowed pastoralists to take part in a broader social experience. These opportunities increased the value they placed on education. The inclusion nomads felt within the education system was the result of a strong commitment from the government and teachers to the people, to modernizing the country as a whole and to respecting the pastoral way of life (Demberel & Penn, 2006; Steiner-Khamsi & Stolpe, 2005). Demberel writes, “It became evident that people with education had a better standard of living, yet one which did not necessarily mean abandoning herding” (Demberel & Penn, 2006, p. 199).

In post-socialist Mongolia, equality remained central to the nomadic view of education but several other elements have become apparent. As discussed in the Curriculum section, the findings of the Gobi Women's Project showed that nomads wanted education in subjects crucial to expanding their life but which did not necessarily pertain to herding (Robinson 1997). The subjects included clothing and boot fabrication as well as health and family planning. The utility of the courses was constantly considered and reevaluated. Moreover, nomads did not search for 'modernized' practices. “Older people were particularly valued, as they were a source of traditional knowledge and skills,” Robinson emphasizes (1997, p. 19).

The Mongolian pastoralist view of education is tightly centered upon the three ideals that are expressed above: equality, respect for pastoral living and inclusion. These ideals are present in their views on all Mongolian life as well, from their interpretation of governance, both socialist and democratic, to their understanding of their contributions to greater society, both in planned and market economies. Pastoralist expectations and concerns revolve around these three ideas and they must be

meaningfully considered when viewing the Mongolian education system.

Nigeria

Having not had the same educational success as Mongolia, Nigerian pastoralists' view of education is often filled with concerns over its effects on their culture. Consequently, they view new programs with some trepidation and desire greater assurance that the program will meet their expectations. Again, this does not mean that Nigerian nomads do not want or seek education. As one Fulani leader puts it, “We are not opposed to the idea of getting our children to schools, but we fear that at the end of their schooling they will only be good at eating up cattle instead of tending and caring for them” (Iro, 2006, p. 51). Education provided by the government in the past has focused a great deal on animal husbandry (Krätli 2006). In many ways, this is an insult to the pastoralists who not only consider their knowledge superior to that of sedentary folk but also view the care of their cattle as an essential part of their identity. Current education programs are at odds with nomadic life in other ways as well. Tawari traces some low attendance to the overlap, particularly in October, of school sessions and peak times in the pastoral season (2002). The lack of a nomad-specific calendar only increases pastoralist concerns that 'western' education may be inherently antagonistic to their way of life.

Thus, the nomads' expectation is that a viable system of education address these concerns. Umar's list of nomads' expectations includes education in literacy, numeracy, obtaining cattle feeds and vaccines, identifying fake and out of date drugs, obtaining legal redress and government, in order to protect their rights and confront corruptions (2006). All of these subjects revolve around communication with the non-nomadic community. Nomads expect education to provide them with the ability to address foreign culture, not to change or reevaluate their own. Pastoralists are not adverse to development either. Contrary to the notion that nomads, particularly Islamic nomads, place little value on female education, pastoralist parents in Nigeria have expressed a significant preference for and confidence in female teachers (Usman, 2005). Parents and children look to them as role models and

the teachers are especially important in discussing reproductive issues with young girls. Nomads expect education to differentiate between their cultural values, such as traditional herding techniques, and areas where they seek to expand their lives. Only then can education succeed within a Nigerian nomadic context.

Discussion

The first and most striking difference between the Mongolian and Nigerian cases is the lack of stress Mongolian nomads place on communicating with others. Put simply, within a homogenous education system, there is no 'other' culture with whom dialogue issues can occur. Education providers and clients share an implicit understanding. In culturally heterogeneous contexts, there must be a primary focus on developing communication skills on both sides, for the education providers and their clients. Deeper education issues cannot be discussed *until* methods of communication are adequately addressed.

The priority set on communication relates to the Mongolian expectation of inclusion. Because sedentary and nomadic share a similar culture, definitions of achievement and respect are also similar. Thus, the idea of inclusion revolves around tangible achievements which, in the case of Mongolia, include tertiary education and similar employment opportunities for their children. In Nigeria, ideas about value and achievement do not directly correspond between cultural groups. Therefore, inclusion deals with more abstract concepts such as having equal national voice, political sway and cultural respect. In these areas, equality occurs between the cultures and the groups rather than between any particular individuals. Working this way acknowledges that individuals from different cultures, while being equal, are not comparable in a direct sense. The idea of inclusion is important in both the homogeneous and heterogeneous cases. Nevertheless, the set of priorities and processes which define a culture's sense of inclusion for its individuals cannot be assumed but rather must be rigorously reconsidered.

Finally, issues of communication and inclusion are in effect part of the greater expectation of equality and respect. Though expressed in different ways, both groups articulated a desire for an education which was an addition to their way of life, not one that encouraged or demanded a break from their pastoral lifestyle. Krätli notes that education is inherently "ideological" and reproduces the system on which it is based (2006, p. 9). Thus, education can only be effective for nomads when it is a successful representation of their culture *as they see it*. Otherwise new programs, well-intentioned or not, will inherently be antagonistic to pastoral groups. In culturally homogenous societies, this hurdle is automatically removed. For multicultural groups, the road is inevitably longer towards providing meaningful and relevant education for all.

Conclusions

Before specifically examining culture's influence and effects in nomadic education, it is important to note the non-cultural factors affecting education in these two example countries. First and foremost, economics has had an enormous influence on both countries. Mongolia benefited from over 50 years of significant aid from Russia. Most countries do not have such luxuries and struggle to attain their goals in general education, much less for those of nomadic education. Secondly, governance. Mongolia has been a stable country throughout most of its history. Nigeria has experienced a long series of government changes and corrupt leaders. Yet while these factors cannot be understated, neither can the effects of culture. It is an intrinsic part of how we communicate and live our lives. Krätli notes that education always comes from a cultural point of view (2006). The situations of Mongolia, Nigeria and all other countries struggling to provide adequate education to nomads must be examined with a balanced consideration of all these factors.

The above sections show the importance of cultural considerations in realizing education programs. The prevailing themes of respect, equality and inclusion are not new or foreign to designers of traditional education. The difficulties lie in the different definitions that cultures have for each and

how these themes are expressed within the interactions between cultures. For example, Mongolian nomads defined equality as having similar academic and employment opportunities. For Nigerian pastoralists, equality means having the ability to navigate through and communicate with the surrounding cultures without being considered 'backwards.' An emphasis on access to similar jobs was uninteresting and in some cases perceived as a threat. For nomadic education initiatives, it is not enough to profess a need for respect, equality and inclusion. Otherwise, these programs will only "reflect existing, and exclusive, hegemonies" present in traditional sedentary education (Dyer, 2001, p. 315). Instead, they must initiate a conversation about the meaning that these concepts have for nomads regarding their needs, traditions and cultures.

The same holds true for all marginalized populations. They are marginal precisely because they do not share the same needs and cultural setting as the majority. Thus, they cannot effectively benefit from a system designed for 'standard' society. This much we already know. But more must be done to identify and understand each marginalized group's perspective. From there, educators can better understand what should be taught and how. Education for marginalized populations, along with programs like Education For All, cannot and will not succeed without better cultural considerations. Deep cultural understanding must be achieved *before* education systems are designed and money is spend on flawed programs.

The contrast shown here between nomadic education in culturally homogenous and heterogeneous societies highlights the difficulties many countries must overcome to accomplish their education goals. But as Nigeria shows, these hurdles can be overcome and effective education can be realized for nomads and many others.

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